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## CHAPTER BY CHAPTER



# CHAPTER BY CHAPTER THROUGH THE BIBLE

EXPOSITORY AND DEVOTIONAL  
COMMENTS

BY

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IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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Dedicated  
IN GROWING LOVE AND DEEPENING RESPECT  
TO  
MY WIFE



## FOREWORD

THESE studies in the Sacred Word are designed, in the main, for busy people who earnestly desire Daily Manna for sustenance of their spiritual life and help in their work for God, but who, in the crowded hurry of modern life, find little time for personal meditation.

They aim at presenting a single aspect of the Divine Gift of Life in Christ, with its implicates and imperatives of human obligation, from every chapter of the Bible in turn ; and it is my earnest hope that, since the Pre-eminent Lord is their entire theme, they may not fail of the purpose for which they are sent out in their present form. If, indeed, they can but make more real the sufficiency and simplicity that are in Him to any of His hard-pressed servants—at the Family Altar, in the secret Trysting Place, or in preparation for the ministry of Pulpit and Bible Class, I shall be more than compensated for the labour of love they have involved.

J. STUART HOLDEN.

ST. PAUL'S, PORTMAN SQUARE,

*June, 1920.*





**The evening and the morning were the first day.**

IT is significant that the record of each phase of the Creation should be thus completed. Had this been merely a humanly-devised account, the strong probability is that this statement would have been inverted to read "the morning and the evening." The progress of God's working is, however, always from darkness to light ; and so the outcome of His creative power is thus described. For whether in the realm of material things, or in the higher realms of the soul, this is always the direction of His energies—from evening to morning. His way is marked by a track of increasing light, in the brightness of which His people rejoicingly walk.

Beginning, then, on its first page, this Divine principle is seen at work throughout the Word of God. But never so clearly as in Him Who focussed in Himself every ray of light which hitherto had been shed upon the world, and became both its Morning Star and its noon-day Sun. As men came into contact with Him, they stood revealed ; and as they companied with Him, they knew themselves renewed. "Out of darkness into His marvellous light," is no hyperbole or mere figure of speech ; for no other word adequately expresses the change which He makes in men. As they journey onward in His fellowship, the light increases in its intensity, so that their pathway shines "more and more unto the perfect day." And when from heavenly heights their earthly pilgrimage shall one day be scanned, it shall be recognized as having led through the evening to the morning of the first day.

GENESIS ii. 17.

In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

THE act specified is trifling, but the principle involved is tremendous. It seems a small thing that God should test man on this wise, and a strange thing that man should fail under such a prohibition. Yet this experience of failure in Eden is constantly repeated when men are brought into contact with God's law. For just as in the midst of the Garden the tree of temptation grew, so at the heart of all God's good gifts there lies the certainty of moral test. Apart from it indeed, innocence would fail of all virtue. It is only by conflict and conquest that it is transformed into purity. The existence of moral alternatives and the necessity of choice, testify at once to the love of God, and proclaim the true dignity of man made in His image.

The consequence of a single sin is unspeakable when the alternative ways of life and death have been disclosed. For the choice which a man makes determines his destiny. Sin can never be a light or trifling thing in the sight of God, Whose ideal for His children is unsullied holiness ; and, in consequence, sin can never go unpunished. Indeed, its penalty is part of itself, for it is "in *the day* that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Every sin is destructive of instinct, capacity, and energy. Death actually begins to work in the same hour of a man's deliberate choice of wrong. Nothing of regret nor resolve can stay its power. It is the inexorable law that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." But blessed be God for One Who was "made sin for us." We have eaten the fruit of sin, but He has drunk the cup of death for us. It is true that the wages of sin is death indeed, but we need never now reap them.

The Lord God . . . clothed them.

HOW profound is the pity of the Lord for His sinful children, confused with the shame of their misdoing ! And how pathetic are their vain attempts to cover themselves from His eye and their own. It is in the hour of their awakened consciousness of utter need that His Fatherly love declares itself, in what is at once provision for their need and prophecy of yet greater things to come. This is, the first record of sacrifice—the beginning of the scarlet thread which runs through the warp and woof of the Sacred Word. It is not without deep significance that God Himself should slay the innocent victims of man's wrongdoing, in order to provide adequate covering for his shame. Thus the tragedy of death and life enacted here in the Garden, foreshadows the greater one on Calvary's hill. Here, as there, what man could never do for himself God accomplished at unspeakable cost to Himself. In no wise apart from sacrifice can the guilt of man be dealt with.

It has ever been the way of fallen nature to justify and assert itself ; and the danger, is lest following this impulse, we put from us the Divine provision until our loss is eternal. The fig-leaves laboriously gathered, and sewed together by strenuous activity, may satisfy our pride, but only minister to our further shame. For, deliberately chosen as an alternative to the garment of a Blood-stained righteousness, they represent, not ignorance of God's ways, but indignity to God's love. How wise are those who "naked come to Him for dress," and "helpless look to Him for grace" !

Where is . . . thy brother ?

THUS early on in the history of the human family is the note of personal responsibility sounded. For we are not, nor ever can be, mere unrelated units. Each is vitally joined to the other by God-forged links. Nor can any deny his measure of responsibility regarding those to whom he is thus bound, without incurring Divine displeasure and retribution. Cain's indignant response to God's query, "Am I my brother's keeper?" received no answer. Even in that dim light the fact was too obvious to warrant insistence.

Right down the ages this same voice of God rings, and never more clearly than to-day. It is part of His expectation that those enriched by His blessing should exert themselves for the blessing of others. Indeed, this is the interpretation of the providential ordering of all life's circumstances. Every human kinship and every necessary contact with others is a Divinely-arranged opportunity for the exercise of protective and enriching influence. The obligation of the sons of God is only discharged by their utmost service on behalf of the whole family. How often, alas, it is neglected and even perverted! How often in answer to the Divine challenge does the answer return, not only that the erring brother has not been sought, but that he is erring just because of some evil influence flowing from the life of the one who should have been his helper! Let none of us imagine ourselves free of this responsibility. While any of those to whose lives possible entrance has been afforded us are still away from the kindly shelter of God's grace, we cannot shut our ears to His plaintive question: "Where is thy brother?" And though we turn a deaf ear to it now, it will arrest us one day at the Throne of Judgment.

**Enoch walked with God**

A FEW sentences furnish the entire record of the life of one whose name has come to stand for intimate and progressive fellowship with God. Yet nothing can be more comprehensive or inspiring than this simple account of a life of partnership with the Divine. Nor is there any higher ideal for those who have come to know Him in Jesus Christ.

As with Enoch, so with us, the walk with God has a definite beginning—for it was not until after the birth of his son, when the responsibilities of life doubtless came home to him in a new way, that he began to live in this holy companionship. Similarly, in some crisis of conscious need, weakness, or loneliness, do men variously realize and respond to the Divine invitation. No one ever drifts into positive relationships with God. They are at all times the result of the soul's response to the call of His love ; and upon this step every succeeding one in the walk depends.

It is simple truth that "two cannot walk together except they be agreed." And herein lies the meaning of daily surrender to the Will of God. We must submit ourselves to His choice of direction, and resolutely bend all our moral energies to the glad task of keeping step with Him. The way may, and often does, lead through unkindly country, in which difficulties abound, and dangers are on every hand. Yet these cannot dissuade or deter the one who realizes by faith the presence of his unseen Lord. And the whole of such a life is but prophetic of eternal glory, when, according to the Saviour's promise, those who overcome shall walk with Him "in white." For that glad day the experience of present fellowship with Him is our preparation.

Noah found grace.

THE salvation of Noah and his family was no arbitrary act on the part of God. Noah found grace then, as men find grace to-day, by seeking it at the hand of God. In his day, as in this, the Evangel proclaimed that "every one that seeketh findeth"; and then, as now, grace sought and found meant covenanted salvation. The Ark is open to all upon the terms of the Divine invitation "Come." Those within it are saved, not because of *what* they are, but because of *where* they are—under the shelter of God's assured power.

It is significant that everything connected with the re-peopling of the world and its new life should be the outcome of Noah's relationship with God. His finding of grace had larger consequences than he ever imagined—for it is ever true that the grace of God renews and capacitates men so that they become channels of Divine blessing and instruments of Divine righteousness. Life is a larger thing than many of us conceive. The outcome of its experience of God is by no means restricted to the personal sphere. Even the seemingly smallest life is charged with the potentiality of the Infinite, when brought into fellowship with Him. If any man, therefore, fails of the grace of God, he thwarts purposes larger and greater than can be measured. In view of this possibility, how heavy is the condemnation resting upon him who indifferently regards every intimation from Heaven, and lives as though God had not revealed Himself!

## The Lord shut him in.

THE door of the Ark, whose closing shut out the rejecting world, shut in also those who were obedient to the Divine Word, with God Himself. He Himself had stood at the open door and invited them into its certain fellowship of safety. Now, when the danger is imminent, the same act of Divine power brings to an end the world's opportunity, and makes certain the safety of the believer. What a prospect is theirs, to be shut in with God Himself! There are lessons to be learned which only He can teach, and secrets to be disclosed which only He can reveal. There are purposes to be strengthened, and faults to be corrected, which only He can accomplish. And this ministry is the certain experience of those whose fellowship is restricted by Divine ordering to Himself, and to His people.

Standing as it does for ever a complete picture of God's eternal salvation in Christ, the Ark speaks, not only of the life saved, but of the life separated also unto Him Who is its Redeemer. Riding victoriously over every wave of judgment, it proclaims both the destiny of those without, and the sufficiency of those within—for it declares their satisfying fellowship with the Lord Himself, in Whose secret they dwell. They are, it is true, shut up to Himself alone, but only to find in Him the supply of their every need, and the deep satisfaction of their every instinct. And in that holy separation, behind the shut door, they are increasingly persuaded that He is able to keep all that they have committed to Him, until the assuaging of the Flood and the breaking of the Day.



**And God remembered.**

"YET will I not forget thee," is part of the super-scription of the Covenant. The interests of God's people are so inextricably bound up with His own glory, that He cannot forget them. Love has the longest memory of all ; and the interpretation of God's changeless remembrance of His people's need, and of their dependence upon Him, is to be found in the fact of His abiding love. Dark days are apt to come upon us from time to time, when it is easy to imagine that we have been forgotten, that His controlling hand has slackened its grip of our affairs, that we have somehow slipped out of His beneficent scheme of things, and that our sun of brightness has been finally eclipsed. We are apt on such days to confuse weather with climate. And yet has it not always been our experience that the sun comes out again, that the clouds vanish, and that in any one of a thousand ways God declares His unchangeableness ? Faith needs to insure itself against failure, by bearing this recurrent experience in mind, and by laying well to heart the fact of His forgetfulness.

God remembers, not only the needs of His people, but His own promises also. In Christ He has pledged Himself. Every word of His is "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Hence it is the merit of Christ alone which secures us from any failure in respect of the Covenant. For our Representative is before the Throne. Every believer is on this account remembered, and every promise of God is by this fact made certain. To remember, therefore, not only that God remembers, but the ground of His remembrance also, is the secret of abiding peace and unbroken joy. It inspires, as nothing else can, the unending doxology of thanks for His Unspeakable Gift



**§ do set My bow in the cloud.**

ONLY when the experiences of the Flood have given penetrative power to vision, is the rainbow invested with sacramental significance. It had already, doubtless, frequently appeared ; for there is no hint that the laws of refraction and reflection by which it is produced were not in operation from the beginning. Now the experiences, however, through which he has passed, have prepared Noah to see God in his works, and to understand their meaning as was hitherto impossible. Life for God's children is never to be without its tests, but likewise is never to be without its token. The clouds will surely come, darkening their lives and arousing their fears. But the bow is there, too ; and He will always make the clouds His chariots.

The fact that in the most fleeting things with which we are acquainted God sets His seal, is full of fruitful suggestion to faith. Darkest things have brightest uses. The most untoward things are full of valuable meanings to the one who realizes that all life's transitory experiences are governed by the unfaltering design of Love. In the cloud of sin which settles upon those who wilfully forsake His law, God sets the bow of His forgiving love. Its ends touch earth's darkest place, while its span embraces the brightness of the Throne. In the cloud of temptation, the uplifted eye can always discern the bow of His faithful succour. In the cloud of anxiety He unfailingly sets the bow of His faithful promise to keep His pledges to His people ; and in the dark cloud of death which hovers over us, the bow of immortality shines in all its beauty, declaring that there is nothing whatever between us and the highest Heaven, but the Covenant of mercy.

**A mighty hunter before the Lord.**

AT first sight there seems something almost incongruous in the association of the pursuits of the field and the chase with the sanctities of fellowship with God. Yet, in reality, there is nothing lawful in any man's toil or pleasure, which may not be hallowed by being carried on as under the Lord's eye. Indeed, this word stands as a declaration of the fact that every necessary department of life is ennobled and redeemed from sordidness by being lifted into the realm of fellowship with God. It is the Old Testament anticipation of the New Testament precept: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God."

How strong is the temptation so to order our lives as almost unintentionally to separate the so-called secular spheres from the so-called sacred! The child of God's business pursuits, home concerns, and all the other interests of his life, should be regarded each as part of the service of God. The office should be an oratory, and the shop a sanctuary, to those who are His; for has He not unmistakably declared that He is as truly served by the honest work of men's hands as by the sincere worship of their lips? The faithful artisan "before the Lord" is a living witness of His grace, far exceeding in power of influence the spoken eloquence of which others are capable. Indeed, Christ Himself was a carpenter "before the Lord." And herein is our inspiration to carry on all life's concerns with the certainty of securing His pleasure.

**Let us build . . . a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven**

SUCH is the determination of unbelief, which discredits God's promise that never again shall the earth be destroyed by flood. Had this His word been believed, the tragedy of Babel had never been enacted. When men begin to esteem His Word lightly, they usually begin also to put forward their own efforts as alternative to the provisions of His Covenant. All attempt to reach the heavenly standard of requirement by mere development of natural character and laborious labour, evokes Divine disfavour, simply because it does despite to the already completed work of His grace. There has been already established perfect communication between lowest earth and highest Heaven ; and in it lies the possibility of the uplifting of the unlikeliest into fellowship with God. But it is not by means of any man-built tower, erected on shifting foundations of earth ; but by the Son of Man Himself Who descended from Heaven. To turn from Him to any work of our own, however sincerely planned and strenuously accomplished, is to incur the certain wrath which falls upon His rejectors.

It is noteworthy that the outcome of all departure from God is confusion. Nor can its consequences be measured ; for men do not involve themselves only and fix their own destiny in so acting. Every sin has within itself a terrible power of self-propagation. The human family is of a solidarity in which no man lives independently. We inevitably communicate to others our own relationship to God and His truth ; and we involve others in the consequences of our own defection. This is the responsibility of those who persist in building according to their own plan, and on any other foundation than Christ Jesus.

GENESIS xii. 2.

I will bless thee . . . and thou shalt be a blessing.

GOD'S covenant with Abram is illustrative of His methods with men. When He visits any man in blessing, it is not only for his own enrichment, but for the enlargement of his influence also upon others. God is ever looking beyond the individual to that larger circle of which every individual is a potential centre. On this account, no man is blessed merely for his own sake. Divine grace begins with the individual, but it by no means ends with him. A man is illumined in order himself to become a light ; he is lifted up from the depths of his own sin and self-despair in order to uplift others ; he is "saved to serve," and filled with the Divine fulness, in order that it may flow out to a needy and arid world.

Too often this aspect of God's ways is overlooked by those who are most keenly desirous of experiencing His blessing. We are all apt to be self-centred and self-contained, forgetting that the essential character of God is reflected in all His gifts. He is incarnate unselfishness, and of necessity all His gifts partake of this quality. Any fancied enduement of grace, therefore, which is not creative of wide outlook and of immediate and unfailing impulse to generous service, is entirely delusive.

How great and immeasurable is the influence of a truly God-blessed life ! Through Abram, first to a family, then to a nation, and ultimately to a world, is brought the fructifying river of life. It is always true that "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever," in the enduring consequences of the blessing of which he becomes a communicating channel to other lives.

**Let there be no strife, I pray thee.**

NOTHING is less consistent amongst those who acknowledge in common the claims of God, and profess the faith of His name, than strife and contention. It is of the very essence of true relationship with Him that it promotes peaceful relationships between His people. His Fatherhood is expressible in terms of their brotherhood. Union with Him means unity with all who are His. Strife one with another is the direct opposite of submission to His guiding will.

The worthy attitude on the part of any who are unwillingly brought into matters of contention is illustrated here. It would not have been difficult for Abram to stand upon his rights, and in possession of superior strength to insist upon what might seem to be the justice of the case. There are higher considerations, however, than mere personal advantage, and worthier motives than the out-rivalling of an opponent. God's honour is the supreme regard of the man of faith ; and His honour is involved in all the actions of His people. To gain a victory therefore over self, and meekly to renounce individual advantage, is a far greater thing than any success of contending strength could possibly be. It is no sign of weakness to stoop. Indeed it often demands far greater faith and courage to avoid strife than to join battle. Such is always the pathway of the Master Himself ; and it is an attesting mark of those who follow in His train that they do not strive for personal profit. A meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.

**I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord.**

WITH what seriousness does a man who seeks to live according to the will of God regard his own vows ! It is never a light thing to enter into covenant relationship with Him ; though too often, alas, both its privilege and obligation are held in a spirit of trifling, which is apt to recoil upon a man to his own undoing. Abram stands out in splendid contrast to anything like light-hearted and superficial views of personal responsibility. Even though confronted with a splendid and seemingly legitimate opportunity of personal enrichment, he is governed by an altogether higher consideration. He cannot take what might appear to be his lawful spoil of conquest, because of an unrecorded promise to the Lord. Doubtless he had sought His help in going out to fight, upon the ground of seeking His glory. Anything therefore which might be in the nature of an unworthy contradiction, he at once renounces. The real impulse of his life is not in the desire for material riches, but for the maintenance of undisturbed fellowship with God.

Tests of this sort come to every man. The necessity of choosing between our secret faiths and our possible material advantages confronts us all from time to time. The temptation to compromise in an endeavour to make the best of both worlds is persistent. And in that hour when the splendours of earth attract the eye, and its good things are offered on such easy terms, blessed is that man whose allegiance to the Lord enables him to disdain them for His sake. The hand uplifted may be earth-emptied, but is always Heaven-filled.

**Abram drove them away.**

WHOLE-HEARTED consecration always draws upon itself the enmity of the adversary. As the birds descended upon the sacrifice placed upon the altar, so do all manner of evil influences seek to disturb the purpose, and destroy the perfectness of the whole-hearted offering of the believer's life to the Lord. If full consecration can be interfered with, the advantage of the adversary is assured as by a master-stroke. Upon the undivided offering the fire of the Lord falls; and every Spirit-baptized life is henceforth a constant menace to the kingdom of darkness. If such enduement can be hindered therefore, the purpose of the enemy is secured. This is the explanation of the evil thoughts, worldly suggestions, and selfish considerations, which invade the holiest hours of God's people, and obtrude themselves when the burnt-offering is being laid upon the altar.

We all need to learn the secret of Abram's stern resolve. For as he drove away the birds of prey, so too must we resolutely repudiate and put from us all that conflicts with God's claims. Consecration is never a nerveless or bloodless thing. It is the entire concentration of the soul's power upon the doing of God's will, by worthily responding to His claims. It is never a matter of emotion apart from will. Indeed, again and again stern exercise of will is called for in order to drive away the insistent foes which gather around the place of sacrifice. Let us gird ourselves, then, in such resolve, that He to Whom we rightly belong shall have the full possession of us, despite all contestants.



GENESIS xvi. 2.

**And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.**

EVEN a man of dauntless faith is liable to lapse from his steadfastness. The voice of the tempter not infrequently comes to him through the lips of human love, to whose accents it is pleasant to listen, and with whose suggestions it is so easy to fall in. To cease hearkening to the voice of the Lord by yielding to the importunities of other loved ones, is to make disaster certain, despite every earlier experience of God's gracious faithfulness.

The promises of God are to be realized by faith and patience, and never by impetuous carnal efforts. Even though His Word seems slow in its fulfilment, it is "settled for ever in Heaven." Hence it is with entire certainty that He does not change His mind, that we can always wait for what He has declared. Abram, like many another, took the wrong way of obtaining the right thing; and in so doing he laid up for himself and his descendants a legacy of trouble and sorrow beyond all conception. One fleshly act can mar the whole of an otherwise spiritual life. Descent, even by a single step, to any lower plane than that of faithful reliance upon God and patient obedience to His Word, is the forerunner of certain disaster. The only safeguard against yielding to the insinuating voice of Sarai is to hearken so attentively to the voice of God that with every hour the spiritual purpose of life is strengthened. And further, it will be found invariably that all other voices utterly lose their power of appeal, as His voice becomes increasingly heard and loved. We prepare ourselves in the ordinary hours of life for its crisis.



**Thou shalt keep My Covenant.**

THE blessing of God is always conditionally bestowed. It is upon the terms of obedience that He promises to enrich and enlarge His children. On His part there can be no failure. If any are straitened, it is not in Him, but in themselves. Obedience is the pathway along which all that He has promised is to be realized. Disobedience puts any man hopelessly out of touch with His faithfulness and power.

How frequently are we inclined, inwardly at any rate, to blame God because of unanswered prayer and unrealized hopes. The greatness of His promises to Abram and to us seems to afford ground for boundless expectation. The land stretches before us in a beauty and fruitfulness which encourage the brightest anticipations of richness and delight. And yet as we go onward, it is frequently not to the Delectable Mountains, but to the Slough of Despond and the Valley of Humiliation, that we come. Then it is that our treacherous hearts are prone to conclude that God has forgotten His Covenant, because life is so strangely different from what we had expected. The fact is, however, that such experiences generally proclaim our unfaithfulness to the responsibilities of the Covenant. Wilful sin, careless disregard, or indifferent repudiation, are the ordinary reasons for the withdrawal of the blessings to which God has pledged Himself. Yet herein is seen His love; for were His gifts arbitrarily bestowed, the real development of His children could never be secured. It is in the keeping of the Covenant that their moral and spiritual growth is effected.

GENESIS xviii. 14.

**Is anything too hard for the Lord?**

WORTHY views of God's power are the secret of the victorious life. His promises transcend all natural thought, and challenge the faith of His people at their every apprehension of them. But if He is postulated as the God of all power, then the miraculous becomes the ordinary. One of the greatest mistakes we can make is to look at God through the difficulties which oppose themselves to our realization of His Word. For He appears strangely far-off when so viewed. On the other hand, to look at every difficulty through Him, and to see His Power interposed for their conquest, is to make them all seem strangely insignificant and negligible. To doubt Him is to fail utterly of that saving experience of His intervention which is the very life of His children.

Sarai's difficulty seems great enough to justify her faithless laughter, had she not to do with Him Who is the Creator of the ends of the earth. To Him great things are little and little things are great. All He seeks is a vessel willing enough and weak enough to be used by His power. How frequently do we need to remind ourselves of this, when confronted with difficulties so great that they seem to make the fulfilment of His promises in our lives utterly impossible! Unbelief is always blind to everything but that which is seen. Faith looks beyond, and finds Him always at hand for the doing of the impossible. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" To this challenge faith responds with a glad "Nothing," and goes on to prove it.

**He seemed as one that mocked.**

THE greatest tragedy in the life of Lot was not his loss of possessions ; for to lose these is not in itself always a calamity. The fact that he had already so squandered his influence amongst those who knew him best, that (in spite of all the moral earnestness which the angel visitant had aroused) his words were utterly powerless, is the saddest thing we know of him. His townfolk had discovered his moral shallowness. They had lived with him, and knew the quality of his life in contradiction to his professed piety. A worldling at heart, he had discredited himself in their eyes. He might be "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" ; but stronger than his indignation at Sodom's sin was his love of Sodom's material advantages. Now when he really had a message of life and death, he was disqualified for its proclamation by his own reputation.

Such an incident both anticipates and illustrates Christ's word regarding the seriousness of offending one of His little ones. All unconsciously to ourselves those who know us are always estimating the worth, not of our words, but of our character. And nothing is more pitiable than the state of one who has lost the right to speak for God to those who know him best, because his life brands his message with insincerity. As with Lot, this danger attaches to conditions of material prosperity more than to any other. Hence, with every increase in this respect, it is well for each one to question with his own heart as to the maintenance of the purity and worthiness of his life. Better any sacrifice of worldly good than that the warning message of the Gospel should sound on our lips as a mockery.

GENESIS xx. 9.

**Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.**

HERE is the warning example of a child of God falling under the condemnation of a frankly unenlightened man, on account of sinful conduct. Losing sight of God and the certainty of His protection, Abraham in a weak moment had recourse to strategy and direct untruth in the hope of warding off embarrassment. But God loved him too well to permit the success of his plan ; for, had it prospered, who knows but that it might have been the first step down that dangerous declivity which leads to final apostasy ? Humbling, therefore, though the discovery of his sin at the hands of Abimelech must have been, it was the only way by which its exceeding sinfulness could be brought home to him. The necessity of getting right over such a matter, both with God and man, is a blessing, the greatness of which only the future discloses to any man. For it is entirely true that " no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous ; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

With what care should every contact of the believer with the world be guarded, lest things unethical or unrighteous should at any time mar his testimony to Christ. For it is His Name which is involved in every moral collapse of His people. Life, to be true, must be transparent. Righteousness, to be effective as a witness, must exceed and not fall below that of the Pharisees. For if it ever becomes possible for the world to convict the believer in respect of deeds " that ought not to be done," the triumph of the enemy is complete.

God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

CAST out from the kindly consideration of those upon whom she had strong claims, Hagar not unnaturally yields to the temptation of regarding herself forsaken by God also. Like many another, she imagines herself overwhelmed when in reality she is overshadowed. God's love is not as man's, and He will be as near to her in the desert as she has ever known Him in the happier surroundings of Abraham's home. Indeed, here she is to learn a lesson of His unfailing goodness which had elsewhere been impossible. The hard circumstances, the unexpected calamity, and the barren wilderness, are frequently the setting of a life's greatest experience of God.

How close to the Divine miracle one may be without recognizing its presence and significance ! Eyes blinded by self-concern and sorrow are often unable to see the rich provisions of His love for the very need which is uppermost. Many an one, like Hagar, is living within reach of the Water of Life, but is all unconscious of it ; and all God's ministry is directed toward their seeing. Clearly this is the interpretation alike of those inner experiences and outer providences of which every life is full ; for the miracle of the opened eye is a necessary corollary to the miracle of the opened Well. And He Who came to open up the Fountain of Living Water in earth's dreariest desert, is He also Who came to give sight to the blind, that they might see God's anticipation of their need, and appropriate it. How good it is to know that He thus responds to every sincere cry !

GENESIS xxii. 2.

**Take now . . . thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.**

THE staggering nature of such a command can only be understood in the light of God's already-made pledge to Abraham, that through Isaac the whole world should be blessed. The sacrifice called for was not merely that of a dearly-loved son, but of the spiritual hopes also upon which faith had been nourished, and which had become the entire expectation and outlook of his life. It is the greatest proof of Abraham's sheer trust in God that such a command does not move him from his steadfastness. Without questioning its unreasonableness, he sets himself resolutely to obey the strange injunction. And along that pathway he learned lessons of God's power exceeding anything he had ever known.

God's commands always enfold purposes greater than we can at the time discern, and call for the exercise of a faith which is content to act obediently, apart from any evidence either of the consistency or the ultimate issue of the precept. Faith grows under the test of the unknown. Its strength is increasing by its own exercise. To such growing faith God's secrets are disclosed. Just as to Abraham was given the experience of the provided lamb, with all its spiritual significance, so to the obedient believer, who is willing to stake his all upon God's fidelity, is given an ever-enlarging knowledge of the Lamb Who taketh away the sin of the world. There are inevitable tests in the life of faith, but there are unspeakable compensations also. And none can really know God but those who walk with Him from day to day in a pathway of contented obedience.

**A possession of a burying-place.**

ALL that Abraham desired and needed in the land of his pilgrimage was a place in which to bury his dead. He knew that this land was not his final home. He looked for a city which had foundations, and therefore did not seek to accumulate possessions which could only hamper his pilgrim progress. Such was his faith Godward that he deemed it worthless to lay up treasure which, compared to his promised inheritance, was no more than mere dross. In this he is the forerunner of all the pilgrims of faith ; their treasure is with their heart—in the Home-land.

A grave is, after all, everything that the world ever affords. However many be life's successes and prizes, however great its achievements and honours, however rich its gains and possessions, the shadow of the grave is always upon them. To the one whose hope is bounded by the earthly horizon, this constitutes the abiding sadness of life. To be conscious that a burying-place is the final possession for which a man's life is given, cannot but cloud his happiest years. Such a prospect—and it is no mere fancy—is one of unrelieved gloom.

To the man of faith, however, this is no cause of sorrow ; for he would not have it otherwise. The world can give him nothing that satisfies his God-awakened instincts, and can take nothing from him of his true life. The grave which it affords him is but the entrance into his undefiled inheritance ; for Christ has for ever transformed its gloom, and made it a gateway of glory by the passing of His own pierced feet.



**I** being in the way, the Lord led me.

THIS is more than the mere record of a diligent servant's experience in the carrying out of an interesting duty. Although it certainly testifies to his reliance upon God's providential guidance in a quest in which human intelligence had been quite inadequate, it also expresses the principle upon which God's guidance of His people is based. There is nothing merely haphazard, or of a passing moment, in that gracious ministry by which He leads His people in the ways of His will. There must be of necessity a moral correspondence between Him Who guides and him who is guided. We must be "in the way" of His commandments—that is, in the pathway of obedience—if we are to be led as was Eliezer. Outside that pathway are heard the noises of strain and strife which drown the still small Voice. On enchanted ground there are dazzling sights which blind the vision to the glance of the Guiding Eye. In the crowded throng there is so much pressure of other lives upon our own, that the gentler touch of God falls unnoticed. It is only in the solitary pathway of entire loyalty that His unfailing and varying ministry of guidance can be certainly known.

When the heart is free of condemnation in respect of all that is known of His will, then the combination of circumstances by which all ways but one are closed may be taken as indicating Divine leading. The hand that shuts one door and opens another is His. The will that effects inexplicable coincidences is His. And as we follow, we find ourselves brought into circumstances so clearly bearing the stamp of the Divine ordering, that we can never doubt our guide.



**Esau despised his birthright.**

THE bargain in itself seems a trifling thing. Taken at a disadvantage in his hunger and fatigue, it might almost appear as though Esau had been hardly dealt with, were it not for this illuminating explanation of his conduct. The possession of the birthright, with its mysterious spiritual privileges far outweighing its material primacy, had always been obscured for him by his ready surrender to the claims of the present. He had unconsciously come to regard it as a thing of little value, and its retention as certainly not worth the sacrifice of any immediate advantage. Thus, when the test came and the alternative suddenly confronted him he fell, as men always do fall, in that direction toward which he had always inclined.

One of the outstanding perils of life is the forfeiture of spiritual privilege by over-concern for material and fleshly things. While there is nothing necessarily ascetic in Christian discipleship, it is wise to bear in mind the tendency of the body to become despotic. Herein lies the cause of many another failure besides that of Esau. When a man becomes dominated by anything which detracts from his reverence for spiritual and eternal things, he is in dire danger. The secular spirit eats into his soul as dry-rot in a tree; and ere he knows it, he may be overtaken by the stern necessity of immediate choice, and find the hour one of surprising weakness. Upon what a very small thing in such an hour may the final record of destiny depend! Only a moment's weakness, as the epitome of a life's attitude, and lo, the birthright is gone beyond recall!

GENESIS xxvi. 25.

He builded an altar . . . and pitched his tent . . .  
and . . . digged a well.

THE order in which Isaac's doings are thus chronicled is not without significance. His first concern is to build an altar. Worship and communion have become a necessity to him, and hence his earliest energies are directed toward their establishment. It seems, too, as though he wanted to witness to the inhabitants of the place to which he was newly come, that God was in reality his Father and his Friend ; and his worship and witness form together the foundation of all his subsequent life and labour. So, too, must it be with us. The Kingdom of God must be the first concern of the soul, or otherwise life is doomed to failure.

The erection of the tent follows upon that of the altar ; and it is noteworthy that altar and tent were in the same place. Religion is not a thing apart from daily life ; nor is there anything incongruous in a man's turning from the worship of God to the ordering of his temporal concerns ; for He is the Lord of both. The altar is permanent, while the tent is a mere temporary dwelling-place. In the light of communion with God, a man knows himself to be a pilgrim ; and the inconveniences of the tent only serve to keep this ideal of life vividly before him.

The digging of the well must always follow the building of the altar and the pitching of the tent. It suggests labour for the benefit of others ; for no man digs a well for his own use alone. In Isaac's case, it is also probable that he could confer no greater benefit upon the people of that place than by giving them free access to fresh water. Similar opportunity is likewise always ours, for on every side are those whose greatest need is the Water of Life. It is our part to dig the well ; it is God's part to fill it. And this He always does in answer to faithful toil undertaken in His Name.

**Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice.**

PART of Jacob's fatal mistake was in thinking that the responsibility for wrongdoing could be successfully laid to the account of another. A conspiracy of deception like that into which he and his mother entered could not in the nature of the case be for ever undetected. Nor is it surprising that the certainty of discovery should fill him with apprehensive fear. In moral issues, fear is one of the Divinely-implanted safeguards of the soul. Many a man has been saved from the folly of committing wilful transgression by dread of its outcome; and has in the end come to thank God for the fear which restrained him. Temptation, however, to disregard its warning is never wanting, and is never so specious as when it offers a seeming release from responsibility. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, nothing could be more futile than Rebekah's words of false reassurance:

“Upon *me* be thy curse.” For in this respect every man inevitably bears his own burden. This Jacob was to find out in after-years, when these words had become an empty memory, and when the frown of an outraged relationship threatened his every prosperity and peace.

Any departure from an utterly straightforward course is bound to lead to complications and a harvest of trouble. It is not without deep significance that righteousness should be the clamant note alike of Old and New Testament revelation. For God will have His children approximate to His own character; and it is of Divine love and wisdom that every breach of His law is visited upon the actual offender. Only so can he learn the sinfulness of sin, and appreciate the grace which is available to the unworthy.

**A ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.**

ON the warrant of Christ's own use of this incident it cannot be regarded merely as history, nor can its significance be restricted to Jacob. Here it declares the nearness of God to the one who is self-exiled from every consciousness of His presence; hence it is the foreglow of the Gospel of grace. Its chief lesson is that communication between earth with its sin and sorrow, and Heaven with its glory, has been Divinely established. Transcendent glory has become triumphant grace. The ladder is there for men's climbing. The gate of Heaven is never far from the man who is most unworthy of entrance. For, while conscious of distance between himself and God, and haunted by his iniquity, he is all the time within touch of the love of God and all that for which it stands. The bottom of the ladder always rests upon the earth, did we but see it.

A further lesson is that the path of life is strenuous. The figure of a ladder suggests the surmounting of difficulty—a step at a time, and alone. But it presents also the assurance of ascending and descending angels, carrying upward every prayer and aspiration, and bringing from above every strength for endurance which weak man needs. Thus the vision is the opening of a new life, both for Jacob and for us. God accepts the incomplete consecration of Bethel as a beginning of the life of faith. All His subsequent discipline is directed towards its deepening and purifying, that life may worthily correspond with its profession. For Christ Himself is the Ladder, the upward way Home, accessible to all.

They seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

TRUE love lightens labour and shortens distance. When the heart is captured, the hardest toil is welcomed if it only leads to the realization of hope. In serving thus for Rachel, almost unconscious of the flight of time, Jacob is typical of every man wedded in heart to a high and worthy purpose. There is an absorption of every faculty, at once the cause and consequence of high endeavour, without which nothing of abiding worth is ever acquired or attained. It is thus that long years seem as nothing, since every day brings the heart nearer its goal.

If this be true with regard to an earthly love, which at its best and fairest is but a reflection of the Heavenly, how much more so when Christ Himself is the object of affection, and the fulfilment of His will the supremest task of life! In the daily pathway of Christ's service there is invariably much monotony and not a little difficulty. The stimulus of contemporary appreciation is often entirely absent. The work demands an endurance which nothing but a heart in which the love of God is shed abroad can sustain. Hence the most desirable thing for us all is to keep the flame of responsive love to our Lord burning brightly. It must be trimmed by His own hand, and fed by the fresh oil of His Spirit; for its light is to serve in many a dark day. We remember that of Christ Himself it is said that "for the joy which was set before Him, He endured." And in this He and His people are one.

**And the man increased exceedingly.**

HOW differently are the same events recorded when viewed from differing standpoints, and judged by varying standards ! Jacob's prosperity, which doubtless seemed enviable to men, must have seemed pitiable to Heaven ; for it was the outward record of inward perverseness. A man's possessions may increase, while the man himself diminishes in every moral dimension. Indeed, the course of many a life whose final record is of eternal loss, seems meanwhile to be of unbroken material gain. A man's life, however, consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he gathers around him. True wealth is not to be estimated by flocks and herds. There is gold tried in the fire, and white raiment, which money cannot buy ; but which men, nevertheless, barter for money, to their eternal undoing.

Long before Jacob came to the end of life, he had to learn that all his outward prosperity was as nothing in comparison with his inevitable relationship to God. What the world gives, the world can also take away. But the enduring things in a man's possessions are those which come to him in virtue of his fellowship with the Most High, and which, in consequence, he takes with him to the House of many Mansions. The only increase, therefore, worthy our consideration is that of faith, and love, and the knowledge of God. These are the true riches which can never slip from our grasp. Everything we acquire apart from Him, however well it appears to the world, is simply decorated poverty.



**God is witness betwixt me and thee.**

THESE men distrusted each other so entirely, that nothing less than a solemn oath of this sort was sufficient to bind them. In these words they each call down the judgment of Heaven upon the other, if either shall in the future deviate from the straight course in their mutual dealings. Far from being an expression of reciprocal affection (which it has in process of time become), " Mizpah " attests the acknowledged unworthiness of the human heart.

What, however, was a warranted reflection upon the character of Jacob and Laban, may well stand to the believer as a governing ideal of life. The very fact that God is sufficiently interested in human affairs to take note of every trifling conduct between man and man, is an inspiration to live always as directly under His eye. It is when the light of Eternity falls unhindered on every common hour of Time, that even its ordinary duties and relationships are elevated and redeemed from the selfish and sordid. The man who so lives finds himself increasingly desirous of being well-pleasing in His sight. What begins as a deliberation becomes a positive instinct ; and far from resenting the Divine intrusion, he welcomes it as the gladdest fact of his being. Such a one will scorn to take any undue advantage of another in regard to material things. Life to him is not a battle of conflicting interests, but a brotherhood of common needs. He names the Name of Christ, and hence he cannot lend himself to iniquity.

GENESIS xxxii. 1.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

IT is not necessary to theorize upon the nature of angel ministry in order to understand its significance. For there is no obscurity in this respect, in the light of Christ's word as to "the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." They are the agents of God's activity—"ministers of His that do His pleasure." Thus their meeting with Jacob is illustrative of that communication of power for the transformation of life which is the very heart of the Gospel. Jacob is soon to meet the direct consequences of his own evil conduct. The wronged Esau is not far away; and, but for God, Jacob is at his mercy. Around his fearfulness, however, is thrown God's Fatherliness. If he will but really get right with Him, the peril that he fears can be averted. The message of the angels is one of encouraging assurance. But it involves him, and every man similarly circumstanced, in an entire reconstruction of life.

The Bible is full of the record of similar visitations, in which conscience has been quickened, evil purposes thwarted, holy desires aroused, faith stimulated, and courage inspired. But not only are the angel visitants to be found in sacred history—into every life they come; sometimes clad in the bright raiment of joy and gladness; sometimes in the sombre grey of duty or reproof; and sometimes even in the dark robes of disappointment and sorrow and death. Every providence which meets an acute need with appropriate help, and which deepens our relationship with God, is the angel-messenger of His forgetfulness.



He bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent.

IT might have been thought that after his wonderful experience at Peniel, Jacob would have manifested an entirely changed life, corresponding with the change of name which God then declared. It is significant, however, that he is but infrequently referred to, in the subsequent record of his life, by the new name which betokened power with God and man. Thus it is quite in keeping with the Jacob-nature that he should act as he did toward his brother, making dispositions and arrangements which savour much more of worldly wisdom than of the reliance of faith. Quite evidently he soon lost the consciousness of the presence of the Lord, and resumed his old habit of manipulation.

Most strikingly is this seen in his purchase of ground—for had not God promised that the whole should be his? Had he but waited in patient obedience, all would have come to him and to his descendants in God's own way and time. It is always much easier, however, to walk by sight than by faith; and this attempt at obtaining the promised inheritance the more speedily by effort of his own, is no uncommon sign of faith's weakening hold upon God. How differently Abraham acted! True, he also bought a piece of ground—but only for a grave! Jacob had already sacrificed his pilgrim-spirit to the spirit of the world, and now seeks a permanent dwelling-place there. Nor is the matter bettered by his erection of an altar. Disobedience to God is not to be atoned for, nor its effect averted, by any outward show of worship. Indeed, the erection of the altar under such circumstances is little more than an indignity to the Name of the Lord, and the final expression of a lost hold upon His promises.

**We will become one people.**

THE influences of spiritual decline are immeasurable, for "no man liveth unto himself." Jacob was manifestly still a fugitive from God's will, in his continued residence at Succoth and Shechem ; and one, at least, of the consequences of his unfaithfulness is this terrible story of lust and murder. The ultimate responsibility for the evil-doings of his sons rested upon the man who had entered into high relationship with God, and had registered strong vows of loyalty. If he had been living on a true level of obedience to God's will, his family would not have come into the temptation of the worldly atmosphere in which this sordid story was enacted.

Nothing is more specious or seductive than the proposal that the people of God and those of the world should be as *one*. Despite the clear teaching of His Word regarding the necessity of entire separation upon the part of His people, the temptation is an ever-present one. Material advantages make strong appeal, even to those who are truly His. The plea of tolerance and broad-mindedness proves fatally irresistible to many who, in their hearts, know that the true pathway of life is a narrow one. The glitter and glamour of all that is in the world seems to fascinate their minds, while its gifts corrode conscience. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that while in every necessary contact with the world the believer is Divinely protected, he is in dire peril when at his own will he goes into the world for his own supposed advantage. Christ's designation of His disciples is that "they are not of the world"; and it is in this light that all His promised enduements are to be understood and experienced. Only by forfeiture of union with Him can God's people become one with the people of the world.

Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there.

ALTHOUGH Jacob had come so far short of his early vows, and had wandered so long from the pathway of God's Will, he was not suffered to remain undisturbed and unawakened. Using Jacob's memory as His ally, and creating an inner dissatisfaction with the worldly environment in which he had settled down, He brings him face to face with his long-neglected covenant. It was at Bethel that he had years before promised obedience; and thither he must journey before he can recover his forfeited blessings. How great is the love which encourages a new beginning, and contrives the heartening of one who has lost all faith in himself!

Toward Bethel is the only direction in which God's backsliding children can ever realize their restoration to His favour. Vows long unkept must be specifically renewed. Sin wilfully committed against God and man must be actually abandoned. Professions hitherto unsubstantiated must be vitalized. For God is the God of reality, and by Him actions are weighed. The journey back to the place of former consecration may be painful and bitterly humiliating; and ere it can be commenced, either by Jacob or by us, every strange god must be put away and every idol buried. To "get right with God" is never an easy matter for any sin-complicated life. It means the laying of the axe to the root of many a carefully-tended tree,—to its entire destruction. But the fellowship at the new altar, and the saving knowledge of the forgiveness, the faithfulness, and the Fatherliness of the God of Bethel, are unspeakable compensations.

**Esau is Edom.**

ONE of the unquestioned facts of every life is its power of influence. Wittingly or unwittingly, we are always starting or strengthening in some other lives, attitudes and activities whose issue is eternal. No man's life is a mere isolated unit, unrelated to the rest of the human family. Hence a great deal of our individual responsibility is in respect of the influence of life as it acts upon others; and this influence is always of undying quality.

Esau, who had frankly chosen material good rather than spiritual riches, and had enthroned the body at the expense of dethroning the soul, but illustrates this undisputed fact. The course he chose brought him into relationship with other lives in such a way as to bind up his destiny and theirs inextricably. Herein he stands a warning example for ever.

The evil that a man does always lives after him. His influence by no means ends with his life. The Edomite descendants of Esau are now known for their ceaseless enmity to the people of God and to His cause. In conflicts without number they contended with them; nor was their hostility ever abated during the period of Israel's settlement in the Land of Promise. Thus the fruit of Esau's choice and course of life was gathered long after his own day. His spirit survived in those of whom he was the father, and perpetuated his attitude towards the things of God. Since these things are written for our learning, how close should be our self-scrutiny, lest by any means we should be in any degree responsible, as he was, for ultimate enmity on the part of others towards God and His Kingdom!

**Behold, this dreamer cometh.**

THE man who has received a revelation of God which invests his life with new purpose and inspires it with new and forceful hope, is inevitably brought into collision with those to whom the things of God make no appeal. His foes are not uncommonly those of his own household, whose attitude is frequently a strange mixture of envy and resentment. Joseph's brethren personify the hatred which the world has manifested in every age toward spiritual ideals. Indeed, it is this same spirit which ultimately inspired the death of Christ Himself. His dreams, as the world deemed His declarations, were too much of a disturbing element, and hence He must die. Read in this light, the sufferings of Joseph are seen to be prophetic and anticipatory of His whose own received Him not when He came to them ; and of the experience of His followers in every age.

How truly do "all things work together for good to them that love God"! His power is always greater than men's perversity. Out of the evil which they plan He can bring forth ultimate good, and transform what seems like frustration and failure into glorious triumph. His people must pass through tribulation, but only as the pathway to the Kingdom of God. Let every downcast heart therefore be lifted up. Evil may for a time seem to be in the ascendancy and to wield the greatest power ; but God is unsleeping, and none can stay His hand. The dreamer who lives faithfully in regard to his ideals and vows, shall surely one day be revealed as one of the deliverers of his generation.

And it came to pass at that time.

THUS is introduced into the history of God's people a story of dark moral shame and wrong. Seemingly without vital connexion with the course of the record, it is given in startling detail, and is certainly not without important significance. It would appear as though, despite the nearness with which God had come to them, manifesting His nature and revealing His Will, the temptation arising from the moral condition of the people of the land was altogether too much for them. This incident—in all probability typical of many similar ones in that day—reveals both the possibility of deterioration despite Divine safeguards, and the necessity of entire separation and devotion unto the declared will of God. So long as men abide in the world, its influence will tend to degrade them; and only by resolute determination to maintain fellowship with God at all costs, can they be overcome. There is only one way of excluding moral evil and its defilements from heart and life. It is by the constantly renewed fullness of moral good.

How seriously does such a story warn us in respect of what has been called the oldest temptation in the world! Old and New Testament revelation combine in grave exhortation against the profanation of the temple which, if any man defile, he shall be destroyed. Our safety against all such unspeakable sin as this is in recognizing and responding to the presidency of the Holy Spirit, whose temples we are.



**But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy.**

THIS is at all times the compensation of the one who suffers for righteousness' sake. The prison may restrict Joseph's liberty, but it cannot interfere with his communion. Faith can find in a dungeon fellowship sweeter and more satisfying than it could ever know elsewhere. The conscious nearness of God is both an encouragement to Joseph's heart and an attestation to his conscience ; for it is His recognition of His servant's fidelity. And often, indeed, does the faithful servant need such an assurance, when it seems as though the only result of his loyalty is that he is involved in unspeakable difficulties.

It is seldom easy to see that present humiliation is the way to ultimate exaltation. Indeed, the temptation to the one who is perplexed as to the why and wherefore of his untoward circumstances, is always to conclude that somehow God's Will in respect of his life has miscarried. All the time, however, those very circumstances proclaim the mercy of God. By their very pressure life is being disciplined and the spirit strengthened for some larger service which the future shall bring, in which qualities only acquired by suffering are entirely necessary. In the long run even the most untoward experiences are always justified. When unable to see the necessity for the hard consequences of fidelity, let us therefore keep a keen look out for the Lord, and a sensitive ear to catch what He has to say. For into every prison-house He goes with His servant.

**Do not interpretations belong to God ?**

EVEN in a prison, where he was incarcerated on a false charge, Joseph found opportunity of witnessing and working for God. Many an one would have become embittered in spirit under the long continuance of trial so needlessly inflicted. But he preserved unbroken his consciousness of God's nearness, and was thus able to accept the discipline of disappointment and delay without resentment. His sun might be darkened, but it was, by no means, eclipsed ; and so he could both testify to God's power and be of service to those amongst whom his lot was cast. The dreams of Pharaoh's servants could not fail to remind him forcibly of his own early visions, and of the sense of God's overruling Providence which they had created, and which had ever since been the guiding and guarding impulse of his life. It was natural, then, that he should seize upon their unsettlement and anxiety as an opportunity for testimony.

Joseph had learned that life apart from God is an insoluble mystery. Its dreams and realities are a complex puzzle, if He is excluded. The final interpretation of all that troubles and perplexes men is in Him. This was borne in upon him under the long stress and disappointment of suffering, and had strengthened his faith and caused its roots to drive yet deeper into the soul of Divine faithfulness. To these perplexed men Joseph could declare the inwardness of their disquietude. We likewise can only help others in that measure in which the things of God have become realities to ourselves, and can only share the blessings of Heaven as these have become the stay of our own souls.



See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

GOD'S ways are often slow, but wondrous sure. That man who honours Him in all his ways may be led by a circuitous path, but it is a Heaven-directed one. Sooner or later God openly honours the man who has all along unostentatiously and without self-assertiveness honoured Him. Disciplined and fitted by all he had undergone, Joseph was exalted to a position of eminence and influence beyond the largest conception of his earlier dreams. Those long and painful years of preparation were not lost ; for during them he was being trained for the work which God had already planned for him. The man who is to rule must first himself be ruled. God never appoints to any service for which the servant is not qualified by character. Joseph ultimately stood at the right hand of the king, because he had long stood at God's right hand in fellowship and devotion.

Sudden rise to affluence and influence is frequently followed by decline of faith and loyalty to God. Many a man who has maintained unbroken his attitude of trust and obedience in days of adversity, is overcome by the temptations of prosperity. And this is most often caused by failure to recognize that God Himself is the Author of the changed circumstances. Happy is the man, on the other hand, who realizes that while Pharaoh may declare his appointment, he is only acting as God's mouthpiece ; for He is behind every event which concerns His people. The links of circumstance and coincidence in the long chain of any life may be very many ; but the first of them all is securely fastened to the Throne of God.

**We are verily guilty concerning our brother.**

SOONER or later the fact of sin is brought home to every man. Years had elapsed since Joseph's brethren had treated him so cruelly, and doubtless they had thought him long dead. Conscience may, however, lie dormant for years, only to be quickened in an unexpected moment, and to fill the whole of life with apprehension and fear. Time cannot efface our sin. We may seek to bury it in a deep grave of forgetfulness, but one day the rude hand of circumstance surely unearths it, and confronts us with its hideousness and consequence. Sin is by no means done with when men have apparently succeeded in consigning it to oblivion. For all our so-called human wisdom by-gones are never by-gones. This, and more, Joseph's brethren were to find out, now that the old positions are reversed and they are so strangely brought into contact with him. The day of reckoning may be long deferred, but it never fails to dawn.

Confession of sin under the promptings of an awakened conscience is always the first step into peace whether with God or man. The subsequent history of these men serves to illustrate in its main outline the experience of every one who is similarly brought to an acknowledgment of guilt. Peace can only come by the assured forgiveness of the wronged one. But it is the glory of the Gospel, whose first dawns are discerned in these early days, that free grace extends full pardon to the sin-confessed soul, and makes possible its restoration to the fellowship of life. Thus do God's banished ones return to their true home in His love.

God Almighty give you mercy before the man.

THUS does Jacob dismiss his sons on their return journey to Joseph. Life has dealt hardly with him since he lost his favourite child ; and now in the stress of famine and all its threatenings, it would appear as though a crowning sorrow awaited him. He who for so long wrestled successfully with fortune, and managed his own affairs—often without any reference to his professed allegiance to God—could not fail to realize that now he is at the end of all his resources. His fate, and that of his family, apparently rested in the hands of the Egyptian Governor ; and he presents the pathetic picture of a beaten man. It is evident, however, that the furnace of affliction has burned out much of the dross of his character. The crafty subtlety and selfish cruelty of former days have disappeared. At length he has come to know the mercy of God as the one sure ground of hope.

How good it is to know that God may be relied upon in life's greatest embarrassments ! However these latter may be caused, He abideth faithful, His mercy is ever sure, and His power is sovereign in the hearts of all with whom we have to do. All unconsciously to them, He disposes them toward or away from us. We receive favour or blame as He determines ; and hence it is in reality our actual relationship toward Him which determines those experiences which seem to come to us entirely through others. Those who rely on His mercy, and see all things in its radiant light, find peace with which nothing can interfere.

**God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.**

WHEN men are most unconscious of the scrutiny of others, it often happens that they are being most keenly tested. Joseph's brethren had little idea that they were to be tried in the manner recorded here. Joseph, however, sought to prove the reality of their repentance, for he had good cause to know what manner of men they were. Step by step he led them on to disclose themselves, until they were brought to the point of contrite confession. Such humbling of pride and abasement of self is of all moral processes the most painful, but it is entirely inevitable. The human means by which it is effected are certain to cause resentment unless they are recognized as God's own instruments. But then, indeed, Judah's confession becomes the broken-hearted acknowledgment of all men.

How great a part of the love of God is His persistent pursuit of the one who wilfully strays from Him ! Down all the tortuous by-ways to which men turn, He unfailingly follows them, until at last they know the footstep behind them to be His, and realize that they cannot shake free from His detaining grasp. In that hour of arrest and arraignment, the only happiness left to the soul is the consciousness that it is God Himself, and none other, who has found out the iniquity of His servant. With Him alone is the forgiveness the need of which is the first instinct of the awakened soul. We need not fear to confess the darkest secrets of shame and sorrow in the ear of Him Whose pardon of sin is the crown of His glory, and Whose joy it is to be true to His Name.

**It was not you . . . but God.**

THIS was Joseph's explanation of the chequered experience of his life. Not only were these the words of magnanimous forgiveness, but the expression of living faith also in the all-powerful Providence of God. Behind the hatred of his brothers Joseph could see the permissive Will of God. He had turned even the wrath of men to His praise. All unconsciously to themselves, those who had tried to destroy his life had been overruled by the Divine power. Every trial and hardship had yielded something for the strengthening and sweetening of his spirit, and in the darkest hours he had been prepared to live in the fierce light which beats upon the throne.

This is the secret of peace in every life, to know that its events are ordered by Divine love and wisdom. Second causes are of little moment to the man who really believes that God is his Father ; for he knows them to be but the expression of His purpose. Considerably more than half of life's bitterness would be gone, were we always able to say, as did Joseph : "It was not you but God." His gifts cannot be otherwise than good ; even though, when seen at close range, they appear to be far different from our own conceptions of well-being. It frequently happens that, as with some pictures, God's ways are best discerned when we stand at some distance from them. Joseph's declaration came as the climax of many years' experience, in which the latter days had interpreted the former. We, for our part, are often called to the yet greater blessing of those who have not seen and yet have believed in the guiding Hand and overruling Wisdom. And a Greater than Joseph is our Pattern and inspiration.

GENESIS xlv. 4.

I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again.

THE call to go down into Egypt was the severest test of Jacob's faith. God had long promised that the land of Canaan should be his, and this seemed like relinquishing the hope which during all the years he had cherished. God's appearance to him at Beersheba, however, and now this assurance, encouraged him to hold to the Divine Word, despite every compelling circumstance. In so doing, he made possible the accomplishment of God's larger purpose regarding himself and his descendants. Jacob probably imagined that his stay in Egypt was a merely contemporary one, whereas in fact four centuries were to elapse before his family, then grown into a nation, should return to possess the long-promised inheritance. During all those years spent under the veiled discipline of God, they were welded together as a people, and prepared for the conflicts by which alone they could gain the land of their hopes.

It is never safe to take short views of God's promises. His purposes reach out far beyond our thoughts, and the issues of faith's obedience are always infinitely larger than the present discloses. Steps taken at His direction, and with the inspiring assurance, "I will go with thee," always exert an influence upon other lives, also, bringing them into relationship with His purpose. It is this fact, when recognized, which impresses upon every true believer the importance of living seriously.

God fulfils Himself in many ways. He did actually bring Jacob again to the land, from which he must now depart at His word, but it was only after the lapse of centuries; and only then to be buried in the place of his early faith and hope. In his descendants the greater fulfilment of the Divine promise was realized.



**Thou hast saved our lives.**

THUS did the people of Egypt bear witness to the effect of Joseph's policy as Governor. By his foresight and skilful handling of the famine-created situation the land was saved from utter disaster, and the people from starvation. Nor were they slow to acknowledge their indebtedness. Herein we have illustration of how God uses one who is entirely given up to Him. The secret of Joseph's success in his official capacity is the singleness of eye with which he sought to serve God. Fulfilling his responsibility toward Him, he was able to bless also those among whom his lot was cast. Life has larger meanings to every man than the merely personal. Its influence is far-reaching, for its outcome secures or frustrates the glory of God.

In all this Joseph stands out as an example to all of us who are Divinely called to be "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The enduement of the Divine Spirit which rested upon him, quickened his powers of perception and application; and the thoroughness with which he applied himself to the problems of his position secured the reinforcements which made his efforts successful. He was as truly a servant of God in the seemingly secular concerns as in the more apparently religious experiences of his life. So indeed it is with all who "seek first the Kingdom of God." For nothing is really secular except the actually sinful. The lawful duties of the station in which any man finds himself by the Will of God, may be regarded as being His service, just as truly as is the most obviously spiritual ministry. It is thus that the lives of those whom we touch are saved.

GENESIS xlviii. II.

I had not thought to see thy face : and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.

IT is always God's way to do exceeding abundantly above all that His children ask or think. Jacob had been content merely to see his long-lost son, but God is more bountiful than his largest hope. Not only does He give him the desire of his heart in this respect, but a great deal more also ; and as he draws near to the end, the patriarch is overwhelmed with a sense of the greatness of God's mercy. Many times in the past he had doubtless wondered if by reason of his own fitfulness God's faithfulness had been withdrawn. Now, however, he sees that goodness and mercy have always followed him, and that God has been better to him than all his hopes, and greater than all his fears.

How often is this self-same experience ours ! We seek to touch the hem of His garment, and lo, He takes us by the hand ! We ask for a kindly glance, and are surprised by His coming to abide with us ! We seek to be His servants, and, wonder of all wonders, He calls us His friends ! At length, we know it to be a large part of the Gospel that His thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Jacob discovered this too late to make it the ground of a fuller consecration and larger devotion to so good a Master and so glorious a Lord. But we are blessed with the opportunity of life. Let us not fail therefore to meet the generous love of God by the undivided loyalty of our entire service ; and in this respect let us remember that *to-day* is the day of Salvation.



The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

THIS is in fact the explanation, not only of Joseph's life, but of the life also of every true servant of God. He condescends to co-operate with the weakest who sets about doing His Will in sincerity. Feebleness is no barrier to usefulness. Did everything depend upon the strength of our own endeavours or the persistence of our own application, we might well quail. For the enemies to be encountered are many, and the tasks to be accomplished high ; too many and too high indeed for human strength to conquer and compass. But under the feeble arms of His servant the Lord puts His own mighty hands, to guide and strengthen. This implies of course His personal nearness, for such action described cannot possibly refer to one who is other than close to His feeble servant.

What a difference does this realization make, that we not only work *for* but *with* the Lord Himself ! There are problems and perplexities in the life of every would-be faithful disciple which only Divine wisdom can solve. There are experiences of conflict, in which, but for His presence, we should be hopelessly defeated. To yield in those crisis hours of need to the invisible guidance and inevitable strength of our unfailing Lord is to make victory certain. And in such a reinforced life all the glory is His alone. If arms are strong it is only because of His hands, Who restrains and constrains His surrendered child, and that often in spite of the child's impatience and petulance.

GENESIS 1. 20.

We thought evil against me ; but God meant it unto good.

IN order to look at the bright side of things men must live on that side. The interpreting light in which the inwardness of life's experience is disclosed, never comes as a sudden flash. The one who would have its illumination in days of sorrow, disappointment, and perplexity, must seek in ordinary days to walk in its brightness. It was thus that Joseph had preserved an unoffended spirit during all the long years of exile and suffering which the treachery of his brothers brought upon him. His hold upon God had never relaxed. In the darkness he clung to the fact of His overruling will and leaned upon His faithfulness. Thus he learned the secret of the Lord, and was saved from resentment.

God often makes use of unholy men as the unconscious agents of His design regarding His own people. The pressure which they exert to bring pain, to thwart hope, and to frustrate plans, is not infrequently the pressure of His own hand. The secondary motive, as in the case of Joseph's brethren, may be evil ; but the supreme meaning is God's purpose of good. The one who realizes this may well be magnanimous and forgiving toward those who seek to do him ill ; for behind all their threatenings he sees the unchanged love of Him to Whom his life has been committed. To look for His meaning in all the untoward things of life is to rob them entirely of their sting. For God's meaning of good is infinitely larger than any can conceive, and altogether too powerful for any to contradict. In this faith His children live.

The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them.

THE courage of these women in acting as they did in defiance of the king's direction, is a splendid tribute to faith. For in their disobedience they doubtless risked much, possibly even life itself ; nor is it difficult to imagine how entirely unsupported by any public sentiment their action was. But in every age there have been those who feared the face of no man because the fear of God possessed them. Such are the light of every age ; and their record is a never-failing inspiration to those who come after them.

In all essentials this Egyptian circumstance is frequently reconstructed. Men are faced continually with the conflicting claims of conscience and expediency. The temptation to abandon conviction in order to embrace the opportunity of self-advancement is a common one. The king of Egypt not infrequently sets up his claim against the King of kings ; and it is when face to face with these alternatives that the true quality of any man's faith is disclosed. For faith in God commits every man to opposition. There are things quite incompatible with His service, concerning which, those who profess His Name must act with a boldness which derives its strength from the innate consciousness of right. This may involve being in an unpopular minority, or even standing alone ; but at all costs the man of God must preserve his integrity toward Him. In doing so, like these Egyptian women, he furthers the fulfilment of God's purpose far beyond the stretch of His own knowledge ; and is himself invested with the immortality which is the common inheritance of all who do the will of God.

## EXODUS ii. 24.

### And God remembered His Covenant.

FOR many years the children of Israel had suffered the hardness of Pharaoh's rule as the unconscious discipline of God. In the Egyptian furnace the dross was being steadily burned out, as the nation was welded together ; though it was doubtless hard for the people to harmonize their experience with the manifold assurances of God to their forefathers. Many a time must they have been tempted to conclude that He had forgotten and forsaken them, for it is never easy to recognize pain and suffering as part of His love. But they had to learn His unchangeable faithfulness in a hard school as the prelude to a deliverance larger than they had dreamed.

God's Word is always infinitely greater than our hold upon it. Its fulfilment is never the work of any one lifetime, but of Eternity. Hence it is that we make a tragic mistake when we set any bound to His grace. He may sometimes seem to be working slowly, or even to have ceased working entirely on our behalf. When this is so, natural impatience may so far obliterate hope as even to induce the cessation of prayer. Yet all the while He is the unsleeping and unforgetting God of Israel. Men may drift far from their own early faith and expectation, but never beyond His care ; and one day, when the pressure of life is too sore to be borne alone, and we cry to Him by reason of our bondage, the cry comes up before Him. Then we are made aware that He has all the while been "remembering His Covenant," and that it is we ourselves who have been forgetting !

When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see,  
God called unto him.

DISILLUSIONED by the disastrous result of his previous attempted service, satisfied with the leisured duties of his shepherd-calling, and possibly convinced that great causes were not for him, Moses was at length brought face to face with the reconstructive crisis of his life ; and despite every previous experience it found him neither cynical nor indifferent. His mind had never closed itself to new thoughts of God ; and hence he turned aside at the sight of the blazing but unconsumed bush, only to find the revelation of a larger life and mission than he had ever thought could possibly be his. Whatever else this strange sight stands for, it surely represents the mystery of Divine power manifested in human weakness ; and hence it is impossible to dissociate its burning with a parabolic foreshowing of Christ Himself Who is always our point of contact with God. Like Moses we are tested by the things we cannot understand ; and like him also our attitude determines whether its revelation ultimates for us in calamity or coronation.

Almost the greatest need of to-day is a revival of the spirit of reverent inquiry in regard to the manifestation of God in Christ. For reverence is the base on which the pyramid of faith is erected, and is a man's first qualification for communion with the Most High. There is no failure so tragic as the deterioration of life which has no holy ground ; for such cannot but fail ultimately of its true purpose. The one who turns aside from the things of earth as being worthless in comparison of " this great sight "—finds God revealed in unquenchable love in His Son. Finding Him he finds himself also.

**What is that in thine hand?**

THAT Moses should be overwhelmed at the magnitude of the task Divinely committed to him, gives no cause for wonder. Knowing so much of Egypt and so little of God as he did at the time, it is not difficult to imagine nor to justify the reluctance to confront Pharaoh which he manifested. For in one form or another we have all similarly realized our weakness and insufficiency before some task to which we have been inwardly pledged and urged. It is, indeed, part of God's discipline of His servants at all times, to give them work entirely beyond the range of their own powers. For only so are they driven to the secret springs of that high courage and endurance by which alone their commission can be fulfilled. We have to learn, not as theory, but by experience, that God's appointments and His apportionments are always equal.

God always takes what a man has and makes use of it for His own witness and in His work. Moses' rod, the symbol of his shepherd-calling, and at best but a poor weapon either of offence or defence, is yet quite enough for God if it is but at His disposal. For he can so transform it into a living thing of power and action that it becomes an indisputable evidence of His own reality. Thus it is that He queries, not only of Moses but of us also—"what is that in thine hand?" Our nature with its capacity, and our calling with its opportunity, are charged with potentiality if laid at His feet. We have, each one of us, all that is necessary to glorify Him before the proud world, and to add something to the fulfilment of His purpose of deliverance.

### Why is it that Thou hast sent me ?

IT not infrequently happens that the first result of courageous obedience appears to be in the nature of failure, which recoils disastrously upon the faithful servant. Moses failed both in moving Pharaoh's heart and in securing the confidence of his own people. Note, however, how he dealt with the matter—not by arguing, so as to convince the Israelites, but by taking it to God ; and in the frankest confidence challenging Him to a fuller disclosure of His purpose. Such a course is not at all an expression of unbelief, but rather of confidence. He was so sure that God had sent him as to be unable to accept failure as the ultimate outcome of obedience. To refuse to believe that God has made any mistake, even when all seems to have gone wrong, is faith *in excelsis*. We honour God when we trust Him, not only in silent acquiescence but by such questionings as these.

The true servant of God clings to the fact that God's meaning is greater than his own apprehension. Hence he has no diffidence in asking "Why?" He knows that ultimately His ways must issue in victory ; and it is this confidence which is a factor in his present perplexity. Just as any parent welcomes the questionings of the child who trusts him, so does God make each obscure thing a stepping-stone to higher and further knowledge to those who undertake to do His bidding where they cannot understand its trend. To such His answer to their questioning is often the one He gave to Moses—"Now shalt thou see what I will do"! And herein every obscure thing is made plain.



**I am the Lord: Speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee.**

THE one who is commissioned to be bold before men in his witness to the unseen, must first be bold before God in those private intimacies which are the background of every true life of service. The prophet must himself realize the force and urgency of the Divine Word before he can declare it with power of conviction. He must himself be bowed under its strength and awed by its majesty if he is to re-echo it in tones which carry men's conscience, and capture their allegiance. He must wait until the supreme disclosure "I am the Lord" has burnt itself into his very being. Then he can face every foe without a tremor.

The necessary outcome of hearing God speak thus, is the command to "speak unto Pharaoh, king of Egypt." The eternal message is never given to a man for his own treasuring, but always in trust. Whether it be as a message of destruction or of reconciliation, it is "*committed* unto us." How careful should we be to fulfil God's expectation! With what a sense of the urgency of the situation should we daily tread the world's courts! In what a spirit of seriousness should we endeavour to represent God's interest in the children of His love before those who have little thought of Him! And how intent upon communion with Him should we be, that we may know the very things He would have our lips and lives proclaim. If Moses fails here the whole of Heaven's planning for Israel may be frustrated. Let us remember that the one qualification for speaking to others of the things of the Kingdom is a life which bears the unmistakable impress of fellowship with God. To such, even Pharaoh has in time to listen.



Neither did he set his heart to this also.

HOW truly is Pharaoh typical of the whole human family! Despite the hand of God laid heavily in judgment upon him and his land, he failed to realize the hopelessness of holding out against His power. Mere momentary remorse seemed to overtake him as one calamity came swiftly upon the heels of another, but only to pass away and leave him more impervious than before. It is remarkable how much misfortune a shallow nature can endure without learning its lesson. The spectacle of a man with whom God is obviously dealing, busying himself with second causes to the entire exclusion of their Divine impulse, is one of the saddest in life. For it reveals a man who is deteriorating in moral quality with every experience he misreads.

Where God's judgments do not soften they invariably harden the heart. Thus the same Providence which works a transformation in one life, making it repentant and humble, tender and trustful, will be seen in another to have an entirely opposite effect. The plague, which awed Israel into a sense of God's greatness, only strengthened Pharaoh in his own self-content. The waters of judgment which purified God's people merely petrified him. They learned righteousness when His judgments were abroad, while he simply rebelled, and put himself yet further out of sympathy with Heaven. And the secret of his utter failure is here—"neither did he set his heart to this." All light-hearted and superficial treatment of His discipline recoils upon the man himself, and is unerringly judicial. Wherefore let us take warning. For we are by no means immune from the temptation to which Pharaoh succumbed.

## And he said, To-morrow.

IN thus deferring obedience to God's commands, Pharaoh is in no sense peculiar. And in finding the morrow as inconvenient as the present he likewise does not stand alone. For this is the common folly of many who are brought to face great moral issues. Resolves to which a future date is attached are doomed at their birth, being invariably repudiated when the day comes. For no man has a mortgage on time ; nor can any assure himself of the stability of his emotions. The Gospel is always superscribed with the warning " To-day if ye will hear My Voice, harden not your hearts " ; and only by taking heed can any of us be saved from the error and fate of Pharaoh.

With what glamour does the morrow of our indefinite spiritual purposes seem to be invested. To-day the difficulties are so clearly seen and the opposition so closely realized that decisive action appears impossible, and every excuse we make for our inaction seems justified. Prudence dictates delay, for to-morrow these opposing forces will surely be less in evidence, and moral strength also will, by then, have gathered force for the conflict ! Alas ! under such syren-spell how easy it would seem to be a hero—to-morrow ! This spirit of procrastination grows upon a man, until it stifles every sincerity of the soul, and he becomes mere moral flotsam and jetsam upon the sea of life. When tempted to put off to-day's duties and obligations—and who is not ?—remember the warning of Pharaoh's case, and remember above all that " the Holy Ghost saith, To-day " !

**For this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew  
in Thee My power.**

THE unlikeliness of some of God's instruments is a forceful attestation of His Divine sovereignty. All unconsciously to himself Pharaoh has been the object of His providence for purposes infinitely greater than he could at any time comprehend. His life has a part in God's plan ; and hence every increase of his knowledge of God, derived through the declarations of Moses and by the exhibitions of His power, involves him in responsibility. Thus there is nothing arbitrary or unjust in the punishment which followed his contumacy. The Judge of all the earth, at all times and with all men, does right.

No life is a matter of haphazard chance. Each has his place in the eternal plan, and in each the power of God is ultimately certain of manifestation. Its expression however is entirely determined by individual attitude toward the Divine claim. In the one who chooses to fall in with God's plan, recognizing Him as Father and enthroning His Will as life's law, the power of God is shown forth unto salvation. By the acquisition and development of the graces of holiness, in transformed tempers and ennobled ideals, such an one becomes His living witness. And what an inspiring conception of the possibility of life is this for each of us !

On the other hand, the power of God is shown also in the one who, like Pharaoh, rejects the counsel of God, and denies His right. "The wages of sin is death," which is both a present process, and an ultimate state. Dimly revealed though the accidentals of the eternal retribution may be, it is abundantly clear that the great Day will disclose the entire conquest of all that has exalted itself against Him.

## EXODUS x. 24.

**Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed.**

PHARAOH knew full well that if the Israelites could be induced to leave their material possessions in Egypt, they themselves would soon be back again under his sway. It is but plain truth regarding human nature that where its treasure is, there will its heart be also. That his subtle suggestion failed of acceptance is a tribute to Moses' sagacity and whole-hearted determination to carry out God's instructions to the utmost.

The temptation to limit the measure of his consecration and to restrict the dimensions of his service is never far away from the man who sets out to follow the Lord. The enemy is content that he should go "so far," even though that be a great length into the wilderness of pilgrimage, if only he preserves some interest in Egypt. For what does it matter that his desires and emotions should be ostensibly directed toward Canaan so long as his business is still in the world? Sooner or later the business which is divorced from consecration, and the possession which is held apart from religious obligation, will prove a successful snare in bringing life again into Egyptian bondage. To burn every bridge, and to block every avenue of temptation, is an elementary safeguard of the Christian life. And this is best done, at the outset, by the surrender to God of every realm and sphere of interest. "There shall not an hoof be left behind" is faith's courageous response to the insidious suggestion of a half-and-half life.

**The Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.**

THE difference between God's treatment of the Egyptians and of His own people is meant to be indicative of the difference between the character of those who are called by His Name and those who are "of the world." Beneath the seemingly arbitrary discrimination between Israel as objects of favour and Egypt as objects of wrath is strong moral justification. It is always the attitude of a man or a nation toward the revealed Will of God which conditions the expression and character of His providence. "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward."

Those who receive good at His hands and realize His grace, are thereby themselves involved in the responsibility of making the essential difference between themselves and the world plainly visible. Christians are, however, nowhere enjoined to make themselves conspicuously odd in speech or appearance, nor to create any artificial difference between Israel and Egypt. True Godliness is never grotesque. There is no affinity between faith and foolishness. Piety is no reason for peculiarity. At the same time, the rule of life for all who profess loyalty to Christ is that they "walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds." In submitting themselves to His discipline and seeking after His glory, they put themselves in inevitable contrast to those from whose lives He is excluded. And the world is never slow to recognize them as being not of its order. The God-illuminated life never needs to advertise its difference from the darkness amid which it shines. Yet all men know it.

When I see the blood, I will pass over you.

HOW safe were the Israelites, who with but little understanding of its profound meanings, sheltered themselves behind the blood of the lamb at the word of the Lord ! Quite irrespective of all emotional consciousness, this token of faith was at once their shield against the sword of the destroying angel, and their separation from the defilements of the land upon which the curse rested. This, indeed, is the meaning of its display, as well upon the lintel, as upon the two side posts ; that sinful men need salvation, not only from the descending wrath of God, but from the invading evil of the world also. The doings of that fateful night stand for all time as a prophecy and an interpretation of the better sacrifice of Christ's Blood.

God looks upon the sprinkled blood with favour wherever it is displayed, because it declares nothing less than faith's appropriation of the substitutionary sacrifice of His dear Son. It is the sign of reliance by the unjust upon the merits of the Just. It is the plea of the consciously guilty who has abandoned all other hope of pardon than that which the death of the Substitute proclaims. It is the voice of a faith which gratefully cries : " He loved me and gave Himself for me." With what confidence may the unworthiest rest under this Heaven-given shelter ! However dark and unspeakable is the sin which has defiled, it is completely blotted out under the Seal of the Covenant. For it is upon the Blood that God ever looks. The absence or presence of that precious token alone determines alternatively our condemnation or our salvation for eternity.



God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness.

THE way of God's guidance does not by any means always seem to be the most direct. In the largest interests of His people, He frequently chooses, not the shortest but the longest way for their pilgrimage. It would have taken but a few days to accomplish a direct march from Egypt to Canaan ; and, doubtless, there were not wanting among the Israelites those who demurred at the short route not being taken. But God makes no mistakes. Nor is He ever hurried. Israel's greatest need was not of a speedy arrival at their ultimate destination, but of that moral and spiritual discipline which could alone transform a newly-liberated slave-rabble into a nation, with a nation's consciousness both of history and destiny to qualify it for His witness among the other nations of the world. Moreover God was acquainted with the dangers of the shorter journey, and knew also the unfitness of His people to cope with them. Thus in order to be " saved from themselves " they were led by another way from that which they would themselves have taken to their undoing.

In individual life this Divine ministry of the indirect way and of the deferred consummation is often experienced—to our perplexity. It sometimes seems as though prayer is not immediately answered, as though well-founded hopes are delayed, and as though circumstances were leading us right away from the shining goal. At such times it is well to remember that God's way, if not the shortest, is the surest. There is Divine method in every compelled deviation and delay. Apart from the wilderness we should likely become wilful, and never learn those lessons of patient trust which fit us to be His instruments of righteousness.



EXODUS xiv. 15.

**Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.**

CONTINUED prayer is sometimes an expression, not of faith, but distrust. When the will of God has been unmistakably declared and the pathway of duty clearly defined, action and not intercession is the believer's only fitting response. It is not God's way to interpose His power upon inactivity. As men do His bidding they discover His reinforcements. To continue to cry to Him, however, when He has already given direction, is to forfeit all further experience of the Divine partnership. While advance without prayer is sheer presumption, fore-doomed to disaster, prayer without advance is mere fanaticism. The outer and inner life of the believer must keep pace. When either outstrips the other, ultimate entire deterioration is certain.

Not infrequently the command to "go forward" is a serious test of faith. With Pharaoh behind and the Red Sea in front, the children of God are indeed shut up to His power. And in such an hour, if they refuse to contradict their past experience by doubting His present leadership, they come to know Him as never before. Do not fear therefore to advance at His word to what may appear an utter folly. His way of deliverance may be obscure up to the last moment, but its disclosure is never too late. The threatening thing you dread will prove to be the setting for a new manifestation of His power, which shall in turn be a new foundation of faith, and a preparation for the yet unknown tests of the pilgrimage. For the Red Sea is by no means the last of them.

## They came to Marah.

THE sweet and the bitter are strangely joined in the experience of every man. Israel's experience in this respect is by no means singular, nor is their murmuring. It is a common mistake to imagine that a life of faith in God must necessarily be one of unclouded brightness and unmixed sweetness, and a common fault to complain when actual experience corrects this misconception. For Marah is a halting-place on every pilgrim journey, to which sooner or later all come. Grief and sorrow, disappointment and loss, sadness and suffering are part of every lot, nor could life be perfected apart from them. It is at Marah that new revelations of God's power become most surely the permanent enrichment of the soul.

The tree cut down and cast into the waters, making them palatable and a means of life to the people, cannot fail of identification with Him Who was Himself the Tree of Life. By His coming He has transformed all life's experiences, and made even the unlikeliest a means of blessing to His followers. He has made it clear that Marah's waters rise in the hills of God where all the sweeter streams also spring, and that hence their bitterness is tonic. It is from Him we have learned that only at Marah is the human cup filled with healing draughts of sympathy, to be carried out to the wounded on life's battlefield. It is here that He has, by His own example, made it impossible for us to murmur at love's veiled sacrament. In His fellowship, indeed, Marah has become for His disciples one of the wells of salvation from which they draw living water with joy.

THIS is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.

THE provision of the manna was a necessary part of God's scheme of deliverance for Israel. Even their murmuring and discontent could not frustrate His grace. Such faithless ways of making their want known, only served indeed to reveal more clearly the generous love which surrounded them. Even when His children deny Him, He abideth faithful, and cannot deny Himself.

Every ordinance connected with the manna compels our recognition of its typical significance. While certainly history, it is just as certainly prophecy of Him Who, in the fulness of time, came to be the Bread of Life, and to invite hungry men to feed upon His own flesh. Indispensable to the sustenance of pilgrim Israel, and answering to the personal appropriation of each individual in the host, it clearly foreshows Christ's claim as the Life-giver, and as clearly indicates the necessity of individual participation of Him. No man can gather or eat for his fellow. Nor can any store for himself an overplus. With each day's need a fresh and adequate supply is given. None is excluded from the Heavenly bounty; and to every eater it is strength for toil and endurance for conflict. But those who reject the manna, and turn from the Bread that cometh down from Heaven to the poisonous dainties of the world, irrevocably determine their destiny. There is no alternative way of life and strength than the daily making of God's gift our own.

### Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands.

THE uplifting of Moses' hands is an act of intercession on behalf of his hard-pressed hosts in the conflict with Amalek. Unable himself to fight, he nevertheless exerts a powerful influence upon the issues of the battle by prayer. And in this he is by no means singular. At all times the man who brings the power of Heaven into human affairs does most toward deciding them. Unnoticed by the fighting men, Moses is yet the most conspicuous figure in that day's struggle. From him we learn that he who moves God's arm on behalf of his country and its righteous cause, and on behalf of the stern struggle between truth and error, good and evil in the world, is contributing in no small measure to ultimate triumph.

Prayer of this sort is never an easy task, to be languidly accomplished without effort. The uplifted arm involves weariness as well as watchfulness; and it is not to be wondered at that the intercessor is often faint, and himself needing support. This is what makes the union of God's people in prayer so necessary and so helpful. In hardly anything else is the encouragement of fellowship more needed than in intercession. And no service we can render one to another is more effective than that of holding up hands which are ready to fall. The one whose faith and courage stimulates others to continue instant in prayer, is fulfilling a service greater and further-reaching than can be known. This is the inspiration of those who cannot themselves go down into the conflict. The most powerful ministry of all is committed to them—both to pray and to hearten others to pray.

**Be thou for the people to God=ward.**

JETHRO'S counsel to Moses regarding the necessary organization of his labours, is of much more than merely historic value. For in it is declared the outstanding qualifications for all service. Indeed, it is impossible to dissociate either the directions regarding Moses' own work, or the character of those who were to be united with him, from the "able" ministry of the New Covenant to which we are ourselves called.

How solemn is the responsibility of a man called to be "for the people to God-ward"! Such an one must bear upon his own life impressive evidence of his access to the secret place. His character is his credential. He is himself his message. And how great and serious are the issues of his service! He is to teach men "the way wherein they must walk, and the work which they must do"; and it is upon these things that the destiny of every man hangs. It is significant that the walk has priority over the work. For life is always of supreme importance. What a man is, governs what he does. The work of many a busy worker is discredited, because the witness of his life does not harmonize with his activity. It is an axiom of all true service, that he who would teach to others the Way of Life, must himself walk therein with unstraying footsteps. And it is likewise an inviolate law, that every man reproduces his own kind. As is Moses, so also will be those to whom he ministers. And this, indeed, is the serious responsibility of all who are professed servants of God.

3 . . . brought you unto *Myself*.

THUS is interpreted to Israel all God's dealings with them. Their liberation from the bondage of Egypt, their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, and their guidance and sustenance in the wilderness, is all directed toward arousing and developing in them a national consciousness of God. His design throughout has been to wean them from every other confidence unto Himself. Upon them He has set His love, and He is jealous for its reciprocation. "Unto Myself" may well stand both for the goal of their pilgrimage and of His aim. As a nation is but an aggregation of units, this is as true of the individual as of the congregation.

The Evangel is always positive in its declarations. It is never enough to call a man from entanglement and defilement. It is useless to crush his idols without creating for him new ideals. To deprive him of the ordinary satisfactions, apart from the provision of something worthier which more entirely meets every need of his being, is but to unsettle without saving him. God's work is constructive. The impulse of every providence which loosens our hold upon the things of earth, is His determination that we shall find fullest life only in Himself for Whom we were made. This realization will save us from any resentment at the seeming unkindly ordering of events, and the frustration of hopes and aims which are the common experience of us all. God always takes the kindest possible way of weaning His children from all that holds them from Him. And how great is the joy of that one, who yielding to His guidance, finds more than all he needs in Himself!

**The thick darkness where God was.**

IT almost seems, at first sight, as though this were a mistake. The association of God with darkness is contrary to all our conceptions of Him Who dwells in the light to which none can approach. Yet it is into darkness that Moses goes in order to meet with Him on behalf of His people. And it is from out that darkness that the light of His Law proceeds. Again and again is this record verified in the experience of His people in every age. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord frequently comes to His troubled disciples.

We quite naturally dread the darkness, whatever be its secondary causes. To some it is the darkness of inexplicable doubt, to others of unspeakable temptation, and to others of immeasurable loss and sorrow. In this thick gloom one is apt to lose his bearings and to cast away his confidence, imagining that God has somehow forgotten him. Whereas, God has Himself made the darkness a trysting-place, and it is there that the perplexed soul may most surely find Him. His face may be hidden, but His hand is there to grasp every outstretched groping hand. In the silence of the darkness He speaks as He did to Moses, words which His servants are to re-echo in the light, to the saving enrichment of other lives. Do not let us then make the fatal mistake of misinterpreting the darkness, as though it meant His presence withdrawn. It can only bear that meaning when it is the outcome of our own sin, the black emanation of an unclean and disobedient life. Even then, however, He is not far from the penitent soul who seeks Him. That impenetrable gloom is still the thick darkness where God is.



**I love my master . . . I will not go out free.**

NOTHING is more striking in the Hebrew economy than the ordinance respecting the willing bond-servant. Purchased for service, he was at the expiration of six years free of all responsibility, and at liberty to resume an untrammelled life if he so desired. On the other hand, if during his years of servitude he had come to love his master, he might, under that quickening impulse, elect to remain his voluntary servant for ever. In so doing his wife and children became also the property of the master ; so that in the truest sense he himself and all that he possessed were branded with the owner's mark. The record leaves to inference the qualities of the master which drew forth the affection of any servant on this wise. But it is always certain that only love can beget love. The servant's response is eloquent tribute to the master's character. Indeed, it is difficult to estimate more highly the servant's love which was the impulse of the sacrifice ; or the master's love which was its inspiration.

In the light which the New Testament sheds upon the Old, this ordinance of voluntary surrender, with its acceptance and seal, is seen to be prophetic of the relationship between Christ and His people. Purchased for His service, they are nevertheless at all times free to choose between a life of discipline and one of self-pleasing. The door of His house is always unlocked, and no restraining compulsion prevents their egress. But experience of His goodness convinces them, one and all, of the impossibility of living apart from Him. Then, in full and glad surrender, they delight to become for ever His bond-slaves. Nor have they henceforth any interest or possession in life unrelated to His control.

*Ye shall be holy men unto Me.*

THIS is the summary of all the foregoing precepts and prohibitions. God's people are to be separated from all defilement. Their lives are to be lived on a higher plane than those of the nations to whom He is stranger. They are to be governed by conceptions of duty infinitely higher than those which obtain where He is unknown. Hence the detail in which the Divine law is expressed, and the contingencies therein provided for. The law, however, is by no means merely arbitrary and without spiritual meaning. Its provisions are protective, although they represent but an elementary stage in moral discipline and development. For they serve to bring God into the common circumstances of national and individual life, and hence to establish Israel as His witness in the world.

Holiness is the dominant theme alike of the Old and New Covenants. But with this distinction. Under the Law it consists of obedience to a system of enactments. Under Grace, which was revealed by Jesus Christ, it consists of the vital union of the soul with Him. Hence, for us the law of the holy life is not the mere imposition of new precepts, but the interposition of new power. With an underlying assumption of its sufficiency, the New Testament declares great principles of conduct, the honest application of which is left to individual sincerity. "Ye shall be holy men unto Me" is still God's word to His children, but with how much larger meaning than of old!

**Thine Angel shall go before thee.**

OVER and above the tuition of the Law the guidance of God's own Presence is promised to His people. For leadership is a living thing. Men never become devoted in heart to a mere code, however exalted its standards. Commandments and ordinances are, of themselves, dead things, and never create living impulses. It is the living Presence alone which awes every faculty into reverence, and inspires every capacity to obedient energy.

It is noteworthy that the covenanted Angel is to guide the people into conflict. Not by any easy or unchallenged pathway are they to be led, but into and through the country of the Amorites and the Hittites. And the guidance of God is always so to be recognized. To those who obediently follow Him, life is never a mere ecstasy, but always a stern encounter. Strife rather than song most frequently characterizes it. or rather song which rises out of victorious strife. All that arrays itself against His Will, or opposes the progress of His Kingdom, is inevitably the foe of His people. The battle-ground may be in the secret place of the individual life, or in the public arena where evil clashes with good, and the spirit of the world fights against God. But certain it is, that every guided life is bound to take share in the conflict. It is impossible to avoid either the "offence of the Cross" or "the evil day." But it is gloriously possible to stand in that day "having done all" by the imparted power of the Angel-presence, and clad in the whole armour of God. Thus was Christ Himself led, and thus we are made partakers of His holiness.

**They saw God, and did eat and drink.**

THIS almost seems an unworthy anti-climax. At God's command Moses and the seventy elders had drawn near to Him to behold the vision which was to confirm their faith and direct their service. What an uplifting, and altogether awe-inspiring revelation of His greatness and power was this ! And yet what a commonplace outcome is it that they "did eat and drink" ! Had it been that they returned to the people with a flaming proclamation of God's holiness, encouraging them to worship and inspiring them to reverence, it would have seemed more fitting. Yet in such an action there had perhaps been less meaning than in this. For it records for our encouragement the fact that the ordinary things of life are closely related to its high moments, and that there is no incongruity between our loftiest spiritual blessings and our lowliest human concerns.

It is in the small things of life that the great things are tested. Many an one imagines himself able to do exploits in the power of an overwhelming vision of God, who nevertheless fails in the relatively smaller matter of sanctifying his ordinary social interests. It is always easier to do the thing which secures public recognition than silently to lift life's affairs on to the high plane of constant fellowship with God. And yet it is the man who makes his every meal a sacrament, and his every duty a psalm, who, in the end of the day, has done the most to promote God's honour among men. For a life lived in all its details under His control is simply matchless in its compelling influence.

**There I will meet with thee.**

IT was part of the education of the nation in regard to the character of God that they should learn the necessity of humble approach to Him. While His ear is ever open to their cry, and His grace ever available for the supply of their need, they must draw near to Him according to ordinance. He is at all times near enough to satisfy every instinctive cry for help ; but, at the same time, He is remote enough to awe His children with a sense of His greatness. This defined limitation is part of Israel's discipline in the things which belong to their true life.

“The mercy-seat above upon the ark,” which is God's declared trysting-place with His people, is of deep significance. All the details of the ordering of the Tabernacle and its furniture are Divinely-arranged as types of Christ, and none more entirely so than the mercy-seat. It is in Him alone that unfailing contact has been established between Heaven and earth. His life and death are the perfect sacrifice for the sin of men. Hence a righteous God can, consistently with the requirements of His own nature, meet with guilty sinners in Him, and can bestow upon them favour and forgiveness. As the mercy-seat of old visibly represented to the people the Divine love, so does Christ incarnate God's redeeming purpose. In Him the guiltiest may meet without fear the One Whose law he has broken, and to Whom he is inevitably accountable. It is at the Blood-stained Mercy-Seat of Calvary's Cross that they come face to face.

**According to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount.**

NOTHING was left to chance, or to human ingenuity, in regard to the construction and ordering of the Tabernacle. Down to its smallest details the Divine direction extended, for each of them was of important typical significance. It was not necessary that Moses should understand all their meaning. To him the important thing was implicit obedience to what God Himself showed him. In the carrying out of the minutiae of God's appointment he was fulfilling his own high calling. And no man can do greater service to his fellows than in respect of making their possible approach to God clear and unmistakable.

It is the life-service of every believer to translate what he has seen on the Mount of Vision into actual life on the plain of duty. Every high hour of spiritual exaltation in which we see the Pattern-life, and recognize our obligation so to re-construct things as to approximate to its likeness in our own lives, commits us to action. To make thus all things "according to the fashion" demands courage of a high order, as well as concentration of purpose and sustained energy. For the man whose life is ruled by Heavenly ideals is bound to be singular in a world which generally ignores them. He is apt to be reproached as a mere visionary in a practical age; nor does he fail to draw upon himself the active opposition of those whose own doings are tacitly condemned by contrast. His compensation, however, is his realization of the Divine re-inforcement of his whole-hearted effort. Loyalty to the Highest brings life to the lowliest. What greater joy can any have than to see the building of God's planning grow under his hand?

**To cause the lamp to burn always.**

THIS significant token of God's presence was the responsibility, not of a few, but of the whole nation. The shining light was fed by oil extracted by the labour of individuals. Each one thus contributed toward its unbroken testimony to God's presence. And each was made thus to understand his own share in the corporate responsibility of Israel toward Jehovah.

The symbol has passed, but the reality it foreshadowed remains. It is the duty of every believer to minister directly toward that burning witness of God's reality which is the highest responsibility of His Church. Each in his own measure and according to his capacity must, by the devotion of his life to this supreme service, contribute to its continual effectiveness. "Ye are the light of the world" is our joint commission. Too often, alas, this fact is lost sight of, as one and another is tempted to imagine that his individual faithfulness, or its opposite, can mean little or nothing to the carrying out of Christ's command. Nor is it always borne in mind that intermittent devotion in such a matter is unworthy and insufficient. For every variation of the oil supply is inevitably reflected in the shining of the lamp.

If the Church as a whole fails to impress upon the world the greatness and grace of God, the cause is to be found in the personal failure of its members. "To cause the lamp to burn always" may well be taken as an inspiration to fullest devotion in every believing life. The knowledge that its bright beams fall with saving radiance upon earth's darkest places is the abundant reward of those who love Him, and make sacrificial contribution to His service.



**Upon his heart before the Lord continually.**

THE service of the High Priest was doubly representative. Before the people he stood as representing God, declaring His will, exhibiting His qualities, and proclaiming His Word. Before God he stood as representing the people in their sinfulness and need. Within the Holy Place he bore the names of the tribes upon his heart, pleading there the merits of the offered sacrifices, and seeking the continuance of God's unmerited favour on their behalf. From the solemnities of that unseen meeting-place he came out to declare with assurance the Divine acceptance and benediction.

It is impossible to dissociate the work of Aaron and his successors from that of our great High Priest, who "ever liveth to make intercession" for us, presenting continually in Heaven His own finished and accepted sacrifice; and Who, in virtue of His unbroken intercession, is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." There is further meaning also in this typical service. For Christ has associated His people with Himself in this priestly ministry. He has made them "a kingdom and priests unto God and His Father." They are "a royal priesthood," ordained to offer spiritual sacrifices. And part of their holy service is to bear the judgment of others upon their hearts before the Lord continually. How often do those who are busiest in His work fail in this respect! It is always easier to do those things which secure recognition, than to enter into the secret place and pray. Yet time spent in intercessory prayer will in the end of the day prove to have been the most successfully expended part of life. Well may we ask that our great High Priest should "teach us also to pray."

**They shall eat those things wherewith the atonement was made.**

AARON and his sons must be separate from all others even in the smallest details of their life. The prohibitions and regulations concerning their dress, their alliances, their inheritance and their food, were all intended to distinguish them as being wholly set apart from secular concerns as a qualification for doing the service of God. His work with all its all-important issues demands the undivided allegiance of those who are dignified by the privilege of engaging in it. To minister in holy things they must themselves be holy. In the case of the Levitical priesthood the holiness enjoined was but ceremonial. It nevertheless declares for all time both the necessity and the possibility of a holiness which is actual, by which alone redeemed men are qualified for the work of God.

Those whose service is concerned with the great propitiatory Sacrifice must themselves be sacrificially fed. Those who preach Christ crucified must themselves eat His flesh and drink His blood. Their inner life must be Christ-supported and sustained, so that what they declare to others may be a constant reality to themselves. It is only that one to whose own soul Christ increasingly becomes indispensable who can effectively and convincingly minister His grace. This is the indispensable background of busy service. By feeding upon the Sacrifice the precious truths of His Atonement become a present power to consecrate and sanctify the whole of life, until the Atonement itself ceases to be a truth which we hold, and becomes the supreme truth which holds us.

**An altar to burn incense upon.**

THE incense of prayer and praise had a large place in the ordering of the Tabernacle worship. When the fragrant smoke floated Heavenward it symbolized the ascending dependence and gratitude of the hearts of those who had come to know God's goodness. With every sacrifice offered, and at every service held, the incense was burned with this spiritual meaning. As its odour filled the sanctuary, the worshippers were made aware of God's acceptance of their humble petitions and grateful praise. Thus, in no small degree, the altar of incense ministered both to His glory and to the uplifting and sanctifying of their lives.

Nothing is so fragrant in any life as the spirit of prayerful praise. Just as the worshippers came from the Tabernacle services with the aroma of incense clinging to them, so that as they moved among their fellows they were made conscious that these had been at God's altar, so is it with His people to-day. If in the secret place of meeting with Him the sweet incense ascends continually, we cannot go forth into the world's dusty highway without unconsciously diffusing something of its perfume. This is the unconscious influence which the truly devoted disciple exerts upon those with whom he comes into contact. And when life is thus redolent of the sanctuary, it has strange power to quicken desire in those who unmistakably recognize the source of its sweetness. Whatever else may be lacking in the furniture of our secret shrines, let us be very sure that the "altar to burn incense upon" is not wanting. For nothing can take its place.

**Written with the finger of God.**

THUS is the Divine origin of the Law summarized. It is not in any sense a mere translation by Moses of his exalted converse with God, nor any human version of the vision on the mount. Graven by God's own hand upon the tables of stone, it declares His mind concerning His people, His intention regarding their life, and His purpose relating to their well-being. No mere deposit of His will in human mind could have the supreme authority of that which is given under His own signet. Human interpretation never has the binding force of Divine statement. Men may quite rightly and profitably question what is humanly mediated. What is Divinely declared, stands unchanged for ever as the light and judge of all.

It is noteworthy that despite all the assault to which the Word of God has been subjected in all the ages, the Decalogue still remains the foundation of all morality. Its righteousness has never been seriously questioned. Even amongst those who most strenuously and unreasonably deny its Divine origin, its ethical value is readily acknowledged. It stands alone as the only basis upon which the inter-related life of men can be built. This fact of its persistence goes very far to attest its Divinity. Indeed, there is no other explanation of the fact that in spite of all its development and evolution, the world has not progressed one inch beyond the moral standards here enjoined. This law of truth has incontestably been written for all time and for all men "with the finger of God."

**Who is on the Lord's side?**

EVEN in the midst of unspeakable apostasy there are always a few hearts which beat true to God. It is to such that Moses appeals as he flings out this challenge. The sudden degeneracy of the nation from a state of awed devotion to one of reckless carnality furnishes a dark background for the high courage of the Levites' response. They alone of the people had remained faithful when the wave of idolatrous emotion swept over and submerged them all. Whether they made public protest or simply held themselves aloof from the worship of the golden calf, is not recorded. The fact, however, of their immediate response to Moses' call testifies to the steadfastness of their faith. This crisis hour only served to reveal what manner of men they were in the secret allegiance of their hearts.

By sharp and stern demands the quality of professed loyalty to God is at all times tested. It is no easy thing for a man to put to the sword his kith and kin. And yet this is in effect what Christ enjoined as one of the conditions of true discipleship. Of His requirement this sacrificial consecration of the Levites is but a prophecy. In their case it was the beginning of an entirely new era of privilege and of Divine service. Throughout their history reference is not infrequently made to this costly declaration of fidelity to God as capacitating them for His use. And it is always so. To be truly on the Lord's side involves nothing less than open acknowledgment of His Sovereignty however sharp the separation involved. But those who do not shrink from this are abundantly compensated in His favour.

My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

THUS does God answer the sincere desire of His servant who seeks that His way may be shown unto him. Moses' request that God's entire plan for his life should be unrolled and spread before him is by no means an uncommon error. We are all apt to imagine that it would somehow be easier to follow Him if the future were not unknown. Whereas in fact the pressure of the unknown and uncertain is absolutely necessary to faith's development. It is only by having to walk with God a step at a time that humility and reverence and dependence become its characteristics.

This promise may well be taken as expressing the principle upon which each step of life may be tested. There is nothing of casuistry in God's commandment, and it is entirely impossible to make any catalogue of things lawful and unlawful. And yet it is always possible to test the worthiness of any disputed thing by considering—does it tend to destroy or develop the sense of God's presence? The one whose life is thus guided is little likely to fall into moral error.

The conjunction in this promise of His presence, and of rest, implies that in faith's pathway a special need of rest will from time to time arise: for the Divine leadership always involves conflict. In every life there are oppositions from without to be met, as well as wilfulness and rebelliousness within to be combated. Yet Christ's followers are kept peaceful in the midst of strife. For His presence robs the heart of all anxiety regarding the ultimate issue of every encounter.

## EXODUS xxxiv. 1.

### Two tables of stone like unto the first.

THE tables of stone broken by Moses in his indignation at the people's defection from God, may well stand for their utter failure to appreciate and rightly respond to His goodness and love. Nor had it been a cause for wonder had their failure marked the end of God's patience with them. The darkness of their sin, however, only serves as a background for the brightness of His grace. When man is at his worst, Divine pity is seen at its best. Heaviness may endure for the night of sin's blackness, but joy always comes with the dawn of the morning's sunrise of covenanted forgiveness and restoration.

The renewal of the tables of stone is God's second chance to His people. Great though their sin has been, His purpose toward them is yet greater. The strength of their rebellion is out-matched by the strength of His care. He seals His forgiveness by the bestowal of a new opportunity. They know themselves pardoned and re-established in right relationship with Him, by seeing the second tables of stone upon which He has again written His law. In human experience nothing is of such power of encouragement and inspiration as the consciousness of God's trust in the forgiven soul. It is as though He generously looks both upon the nation and the man as certain to make better use of the second chance than of the first; and nothing helps the restored one so much as thus to be put on his honour. *Noblesse oblige* should be the motto of every restored believer. Its true meaning is the inwardness of this gracious provision of "two tables of stone like unto the first."



**A willing offering unto the Lord.**

THE variety of the gifts called for and accepted toward the plenishing of the Tabernacle is full of interest. Each one brought what he could, whether of gold or silver, of brass or linen, of skins or oil or precious stones. And the gift of each was approved, not merely for its intrinsic worth, but for its expression of devotion to the Lord. Each offering derived its value from the fact that it was willingly presented. It was given, not in lieu of personal service, but as a token of the Divine right of possession in every life. Even the best things a man gives can never be accepted as any substitute for the dedication of himself.

In nothing is the wide range of human individuality so clearly seen as in the forms by which devotion and loyalty to God is expressed. Every man according to his nature and capacity voices his fealty. Thus is the harmony of the Church's worship and witness composed. We are sometimes apt to be cast down because we cannot give just as others give, and do as others do. Those who would gladly give gold are often able to give but skins, or at great self-sacrifice contribute a small phial of oil. We are tempted then to conclude that our own small gifts are of little consequence in comparison of the greater ones with which others are able to help on the service of the Lord. This is practical unbelief of the worst sort, which never fails to recoil disastrously upon ourselves. If ours is a "willing offering"—the best response which a grateful heart can make to Him Who has redeemed us, it is in His sight of great price, and does not fail of a place in His Tabernacle.

## EXODUS xxxvi. 1.

**To know how to work all manner of work for the service of the Sanctuary.**

WHEN the Tabernacle stood complete in all its varied beauty it reflected the manifold wisdom of God. The plan of its structure and adornment was His. His, too, was the skill by which faithful men had carried out every detail. For it was He Who had put wisdom and understanding in every wise-hearted worker. Their work simply mediated His mind, and made it visible to the people for their ultimate blessing and edification. "All manner of work" included both manual labour and artistic production. And in every department each worker could say "I laboured abundantly, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." For Divine wisdom was ministered to each, according to the work laid upon him.

There can never be anything secular in the life-work of any child of God rightly conceived. Every concern is immediately related to "the service of the Sanctuary." Every appointment to duty is the Lord's appointment. Every circumstance and capacity expresses His mind. Hence for every detail all necessary wisdom and understanding may be reverently claimed at His hand. The common things of which most lives consist—the work of hands and brain, the duty of home and office—are all comprehended in His plan. In regard to them therefore, as well as in respect of the more definitely spiritual and religious obligations—"if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God."

**Of pure Gold.**

IT is of deep significance that not only were the Mercy-Seat, the Table, and the Candlestick to be of pure gold, but also the smallest furnishings of the Holy Place were likewise to reflect the costliness of the consecration of God's people. For even the snuffers and minor vessels were to be made of pure gold! It is as though nothing, however trivial, which was in any degree to serve the interests of God's House and cause, could be worthily used apart from the truest devotion to Himself. For the gold, of which both great and small things were made, was the willing contribution of His people, and represented their self-sacrifice. Since, however, the best is all unworthy of His acceptance and service, the fact that their gold is used at all testifies to His condescension.

How greatly we need to apply the lesson which the fact of these obscurer vessels of the Tabernacle being made of pure gold conveys, is seen in the carelessness regarding small details which mars much Christian life! To the apparently great things we readily bring the devotion of our hearts. They are made of the finest gold we possess. Alas, too often their value is impaired by the unworthiness of their accessories upon which little care is bestowed, and which are frequently made of base metal indeed. We are prone to regard as negligible details such as habit, and speech, and deportment. We are apt to think that such adjuncts of life as punctuality and courtesy are worthless of regard. And yet these are the very things which ultimately secure life's total effectiveness. We must make them "of pure gold" also, if we would have the service of our larger things accepted and blessed.

**All that the Lord commanded Moses.**

IT is impossible to read such a record as this without being impressed with the Divine care concerning trifles. Not even the smallest thing regarding the sockets, and cords, and pins of the Tabernacle construction was left to chance or human ingenuity. Down to the least thing God's forethought had made provision. And in regard to even the tiniest of them He gave direction to Moses. It is not necessary for us to believe that he fully understood the import of that which was enjoined upon him. In the nature of the case, he could not know the typical significance which has come to attach to every ordering of the Sanctuary. The full light of Christ helps us to see very much further than he could, who stood but in the early foreglow of the Gospel. It is not unlikely that the Word of the Lord tried his fidelity just because he understood its deepest meaning so little.

It is part of faith in God's Fatherhood that no part of His children's lives is a matter of haphazard uncertainty. "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered" is Christ's way of assuring us that we live according to commandment. And herein is implied the necessity for the same stern faithfulness on our part in regard to life's trivialities as Moses observed in building the Tabernacle. It has been well said that "a little thing is only a little thing. But faithfulness in a little thing is a great thing." Perfection in any sphere is just the co-ordination of trifles; and it is to perfection of life and service that our professed allegiance to God commits us as the steadfast aim of life.

**They had done it as the Lord had commanded.**

HAPPY is that man who is not afraid of submitting his work to the closest scrutiny. For all unconsciously it may be, yet very certainly, life is constantly passing under review. Every day is a judgment day ; and only he who so lives and works as to be humbly fearless of the Great Tribunal is worthily fulfilling his calling. These workers in the Tabernacle were of this sort. Day by day they had carefully carried out the Divine direction concerning all that was committed to them, so that when he who carried in his heart the pattern disclosed to him in the Mount came to examine their work, even his high ideals were satisfied. Nor is it recorded without significance that he thereupon "blessed them."

There is a positive protective value in the steadfast determination to build always with a view to the eternal values of life. The man who sets the Lord always before him is lifted by his own high purpose beyond all that is mean and worthless. The remembrance that everything is to pass under His judgment, strangely, but surely, quickens every power of discernment ; so that it becomes an instinct to resist and reject anything less than the best. The "utmost for the Highest" becomes an abiding inspiration to him ; while the Lord's approval and commendation far outweighs all the labour and cost which such entire thoroughness demands. As none of us can ultimately escape the Judgment-Seat, we are "wise unto salvation" in seeking that its light shall fall upon our every task. For every ordinary moment is part of eternity, and no revision of our work will be possible when once the great summons has sounded.

**If the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not.**

SO certain were the children of Israel of God's promise to guide them safely, that they were content to wait for definite knowledge of His Will before moving forward. Although in the main the general direction of their pilgrim-journey had been declared, yet they realized the necessity of moving or tarrying only at God's determination. Nor did He fail their faith. He chose their halting-places, as well as the length of each march, and so preserved them from all the ills which had surely come upon them apart from His protective leadership.

Almost the hardest lesson in life is that of learning to wait. We are all by nature impatient, and in the face of great tasks are apt to regard time as wasted which is perforce spent inactively. Many an overwhelming mistake has been made not because God's guidance was not desired, but because it was not waited for. For to take any step apart from unmistakable indication of His approval is to court disaster. It is better to spend time waiting upon Him than to be compelled to spend it in retracing steps wrongly taken. True, to our finite minds His ways may sometimes seem to be slow. But it is well to remember that He is Lord of all time and of all wisdom. No man who tarries His leisure finds himself outstripped by opportunity; for the cloud always lifts just at that moment most favourable to safe advance. Refusal to move until it does is highest wisdom.

**It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.**

APART from all the deeply typical significance of the burnt-offering, each detail of which is so clearly prophetic and illustrative of Christ's Person and work, the necessity of personal contact and appropriation is of striking importance. It was more than a fragment of solemn ritual that the offerer must lay his hand upon the head of the sacrificial victim. It signified the transfer both of his guilt and his intention to the beast which was his substitute. Subsequently offered upon the altar, wholly sacrificed to God, it was accepted both as a propitiation and a consecration on behalf of him who thus identified himself with the offering.

Nothing is clearer throughout the entire range of God's Word than the necessity of personal union between the sinner and the Saviour. It is not enough that the Righteous One should live and die on our behalf. Nor is it sufficient that we should give mental assent to the truths thus declared. Nor yet again is it adequate that He should be admired in the perfection of His character, the ethical beauty of His precepts, and the courage of His death. Each for himself must lay his own hand upon His sacred head in token of appropriation. For only such faith establishes saving contact and vital union with Him who gives life by His death. Apart from these all the potential benefits of His unspeakable Sacrifice are as though they were not ; and a man's knowledge becomes thus his condemnation.



LEVITICUS ii. 11.

**No meat-offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven.**

THE consistent use of leaven throughout the entire Scriptures as a type of corruption, sheds an interpreting light upon the prohibition of its use in the meat-offering. Setting forth the Son of Man, as this offering does, in the perfection of His earthward and heavenward relationships, it clearly points to His human sinlessness. Only He Who fulfilled the law of God without deviation could be an accepted Sacrifice on behalf of those by whom this same law was broken. It is the infinite contrast between Christ and those for whom He died which gives redeeming quality to His substitutionary work. In Him there is nothing akin to that of which leaven is the symbol. He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

The further significance of this prohibition of leaven is in respect of the one who offers the meat-offering. For underlying every offering is the truth of identification. The worshipper must reflect in his own life the character signified by the offering. Otherwise the sacrifice loses its spiritual value and has no moral meaning. Purity of life must accompany praise of lip and service of hand. They who worship Him must "worship Him in spirit and in truth." Those who keep the feast must do so "not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Their lives must communicate influences of blessing and not of corruption to those with whom they are brought into contact. This is indeed their distinction in a world where sin is generally characteristic of men. For they are themselves the Lord's offering.

## Without blemish before the Lord.

EVERY offering and oblation which testifies to Christ must be without blemish, not only as judged by human standards but in the judgment also of the Lord. Anything of physical deficiency, therefore, impaired the fitness of animals used for sacrifice, and disqualified the worshipper from Divine acceptance. For this requisite physical perfection typified the moral perfection and glory of the Lord Christ. Of Him the Father testified—"This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." Of Him also the representative ruler of the people said—"I find no fault in Him at all." It was in virtue of His sinless and blameless life, as well as by His inherent righteousness, that He was the sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. And of Him also all who come to know Him by trusting Him, declare—"He is altogether lovely."

God must be served by man's best. No mere overplus of material possession can be acceptably devoted to Him as something for which a man has no personal use. A costless consecration is utterly without worth, either in its meaning toward God or in its reflected value toward the believer. It is a degradation of worship and a positive dishonour to the Lord to offer to Him anything less than the choicest and costliest. And even that is only accepted in so far as it represents the entire life of His child. Nothing, therefore, can be more necessary than the maintenance of whole-hearted sincerity in regard to our offerings. As He by Whom alone they are offered is the spotless One, so must our gifts approximate in character to Him by every resolute purpose of the soul. For they are part of His reflection in His people for the world's enlightenment in the things of eternal moment.

Sin through ignorance.

IGNORANCE of the law can never be the ground of acquittal or justification. For every breach of moral commandment brings its own penalty. Death is an actual process which works in the soul of him who transgresses. It is the unavoidable consequence which attaches to every disregard of Divine precept and prohibition. Hence the fulness of redemption must provide for sins of ignorance, which are the sins of a fallen nature. In nothing more clearly than in this respect do the Levitical offerings foreshadow Christ, Whose death is atonement for *all* the sins of the whole world.

It is of importance to note the comprehensiveness of this ordinance. For priest and congregation, ruler and people alike are specified as needing the benefits of the trespass-offering. And its alternative varied character, according to the means of the individual worshipper, testifies to the fact that it is brought within reach of all. In these respects there is no difference, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; and all have likewise been redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ.

It is an integral part of the moral and spiritual education which the Holy Spirit carries on in the believer, to bring to his consciousness things concerning both himself and God. Indeed the creation of self-consciousness in respect of sinfulness and need, is entirely necessary before any man can become savingly conscious of God's grace. No one of us long continues ignorant regarding his sins who yields himself to the Heavenly discipline. For Christ is our illumination, as well as our Salvation, and all who follow Him have the light of Life shed upon their ways.

**He shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing.**

GOD'S ways with man, while always loving, are always drastic and radical. He loves His children too well to let them entirely escape the personal consequence of wrong-doing. Especially is this so when their defection and inconsistency concerns the holy things of His service. And when, indeed, does it not? It is incontestably true that "no man liveth unto himself." Consciously or unconsciously each one of His children is either helping or hindering His cause. Their lives state the case for God before an indifferent world, either in terms of conviction or contradiction. The most serious condemnation which ever rests upon any is the fact of his having done harm "in the holy things."

How great is the grace which allows a man to make amends! It is not difficult to realize with what thankfulness the price demanded as atonement for his evil, was paid by the worshipper of old. For no restitution is too heavy if it but leads to peace of conscience and re-establishment of self-respect. While it is true that God's grace cleanses and covers the confessed sins of His people, it must also be borne in mind that His grace is allied to His righteousness. Hence sin against the work of God, against fellow-believers, or against any other man, inevitably involves us in every possible restoration and restitution. Indeed we should all enjoy much more of the sunshine of God's favour, and the peace of an unoffended conscience, did we give this matter of making amends a prominent place in our moral and spiritual programme. Holiness is not theoretical, but actual and drastic in its demands. And what is unpractical in such respects as these is self-condemned as unspiritual.

LEVITICUS vi. 7.

**And it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein.**

TWO strong and clear notes are prominent in the harmony of this Gospel of the Offerings—completeness and certainty. A man burdened with the consciousness of his sin, who brought the sacrificial victim to God's Altar, as directed, to be there offered up in his stead, obtained thereby forgiveness of his entire transgression. However heavy the weight of sin which lay upon his spirit, and however black the stain upon his conscience, the whole of his guilt was removed. Even in those early days when seen only in the dim light of symbol and type, God's grace was utterly sufficient. Nor was there any cause for uncertainty in regard to its bestowal upon every seeking soul. The one who sought God according to the commandment went away from the Sanctuary with the fullest assurance that the propitiation for his wrong-doing had been accepted, that his transgression was forgiven, and his sin covered. Despite every disqualification set up by his sinfulness, he went down to his home justified on the ground of Divine mercy.

In Christ our Sacrifice these twin notes are found at their sweetest and loudest. However dark is the moral record of any life, it cannot hinder the one who trusts Him from obtaining a saving share in the benefits of His death. The forgiveness which His Blood declares, is both free and full. "Anything of all that he hath done" is blotted out for ever, as the penitent soul comes back to God by Him. Of this glad fact none need lack assurance; for it is attested under the seal of the unchanging character of God.

**His own hands shall bring the offerings of the Lord.**

ALTHOUGH the entire economy of the Levitical sacrifices and worship was based upon the principle of mediation, there are throughout conspicuous directions for the personal participation of the worshipper. The appointed priests stood in an unique and ordered relationship between God and men. Yet the men themselves had to learn that no mediated worship or sacrifice was of any avail, except as they themselves took part in its ritual. And only so could their moral education be furthered. Had they been able to shift the entire responsibility of their necessary approach to God on to the shoulder of the priest, the sacrifices would have been divested of all moral influence. They would have become in fact little more than mere fetish. Since, however, it has always been God's purpose to lead His children to Himself—which is a spiritual and not merely a judicial process—none could share the benefits of the appointed sacrifices apart from obeying the directly personal commands, which formed part of each ordinance. The offerings of the Lord must be brought to the altar by a man's own hands.

In the great Anti-type of every sacrifice this same injunction is abundantly plain. While Christ is Himself the Victim and the Priest, the Mediator between God and man, to the perfection of Whose work none can add anything, yet each man must in "his own hands" of faith bear the Divine offering before the Lord, if he would be forgiven and accepted. For it is his own sin which is in question.



**Keep the charge of the Lord.**

THE entire work for which Aaron and his sons were consecrated is thus summarized. Freed from all secular concerns, separated both by holy ordinance and by actual prohibition from the ordinary life of the people, and dedicated, both by Divine choice and their own personal surrender to the service of God, this comprehended all their obligation. Upon each one rested the sanctifying sense that his work, of whatever sort it might be, was "the charge of the Lord." Unlikely though it must sometimes seem, each single detail was comprised in His commission, and had been pre-conceived by His wisdom. Hence, each trivial thing was of the utmost importance to the one who sought to be a true servant of the Sanctuary. The realization that he had been appointed and anointed for nothing less than the carrying out of God's will in its highest issue, could not fail to animate and establish each one in fidelity and endurance. The certainty that every lowly duty was related to the highest control served to invest life with an uplifting and upholding sense of privilege and dignity.

All Christ's disciples are in an even fuller sense commissioned as priests to "keep the charge of the Lord." The Blood which cleanses them from sin claims also their service. For them the business of life consists of neither less nor more than the doing of His Will. Since He, their Great High Priest, has gone to the Father, they are to do yet greater works than He did. For the bound of their service is the circle of the whole world. To its every nation they are to keep His charge of preaching the Gospel, each doing his appointed task in the inspiration of knowing that his labour is not in vain "in the Lord."



The glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. THE setting apart of the Tabernacle for the service of God and the people was thus impressively crowned. Constructed according to the Divine plan from materials contributed by a willing people, and now solemnly set apart by the offering of holy sacrifices, it stood before the entire congregation as a visible token of God's presence in their midst. Everything about it spoke to them of Him, and made them realize how closely related to the unseen mysteries were the common concerns of their lives. This consciousness was heightened and deepened by the overwhelming appearance of His glory which all the people saw in connection with the solemn dedication of the Tent of Meeting. From that day, indeed, life could not fail to be filled with new significance and meaning to each one. For God had in strange and compelling fashion marked out His dwelling-place in their midst.

The coming of the Lord Christ into the world is directly referred to in prophecy as the revealing of the glory of the Lord. Hence this intimation of God's glory to Israel is naturally a picture of that Greater Event. As in that day, so now and for ever "the Tabernacle of God is among men." He has come into vital contact with His people on the plane of their ordinary lives of conflict and need. Henceforth their every concern of life is touched to finer issues, and filled with new meaning. For all has been glorified by the radiance of His redeeming life and death. It is ours to live as in His holy presence, and to give Him pre-eminence in all things.

## Strange fire before the Lord.

HOW soon does human guilt becloud Divine glory ! The story of Nadab and Abihu is full of warning as to man's instability of purpose, and of the peril of presumption in regard to the holy service of God. For these men had shared in common with the other sons of Aaron the solemn consecration by which he and his family had been set apart to do the service of His house. They had yielded themselves to all that was expressly declared and implied in the august ceremonial which marked for them the beginning of a life of unique privilege. Yet they ended by being destroyed from the presence of the Lord. The pages of Israel's history do not furnish any more awe-inspiring warning against trifling with holy things than this one.

The sin of burning strange fire before the Lord is by no means uncommon in this our own day. Men often become restive under what seems Divine delay or restriction, and presumptuously substitute mere fleshly zeal and carnal energy for the pure flame of Pentecostal fire, which is the believer's only true enduement for service. But the consequence is fatal. For one ministers to human vanity, and its end is deterioration and death. The other answers only to humility of spirit, and exalts no man save the Lord of Glory. It is always at infinite peril to himself and to others that any man refuses to wait for the heavenly illumination, and sets out to make a blaze of strange fire which shall shed its light upon himself. His end may not be violent, nor sudden, as that of Nadab and Abihu, but it is never uncertain. Nor is anything more to be feared by any worker in the cause of our Lord than that, after an experience of His goodness and power, he should himself become a castaway.

I am the Lord your God . . . ye shall be holy; for I am holy.

THUS are the prohibited regulations regarding the food of God's people interpreted. Whatever the secondary meaning of each may be, it has been purposely left obscure; and though doubtless each restriction is capable of justification on its own merits, the spiritual significance transcends every other explanation. By placing bounds to their liberty God both impressed His sovereignty upon their minds, and taught them in an illustrative fashion the negative side at least of true religion. Because they are His people they must approximate to His own character of holiness, one necessary aspect of which is separation from all things of doubtful moral value.

Although the ceremonial law has been for ever fulfilled by Christ, and is hence no longer binding in this dispensation, these ordinances convey an important lesson to all who are His people. Food, whether of the body or the mind, very largely determines the quality of physical or mental life. The neglect of this obvious fact has been the ruin of many a promising believer, who has beguiled himself, for instance, into feeding his thought-life upon things unworthy and unclean, under the specious plea of accumulating knowledge and experience, until his inner life has become like that upon which it has been nourished. This is the history of many an one who has come under the inexorable grip of a law which knows no mercy. Let us be sure of this, that God's prohibitions are His protections, and that the pathway of separation from all defilement is the only safe one for us all.

LEVITICUS xii. 6, 7.

**She shall bring a lamb . . . and she shall be cleansed.**

NOTHING is more striking than the way in which the ordinance of sacrifice was interwoven with the life of the people of God. Every experience and contingency must be sanctified by the shedding of blood, and the offering of praise and prayer. Not only were sins thus to be atoned for, but even the natural functions of life must needs be similarly hallowed. From no part of the lives of His people was God to be excluded. Thus the bearing of a child has its own prescribed offering to God, which expresses at once faithful reliance upon His care, and the dedication to Him both of the life spared and the life given. This ordinance reminded every Hebrew woman that God Himself was at the heart of her family and home life; that its tenderest associations were intimately connected with His goodness; and that He was Himself the ultimate security of all its hopes. Thus life by life, and family by family, was the nation brought up in the fear of the Lord.

All the changing phases and circumstances of life are but so many opportunities for realizing God. Did we but bear this in mind as each new and unwonted experience comes upon us, we should instinctively recognize its connection with the Great Sacrifice, and so turn its joy into an occasion of praise, or its pain into the voice of prayer. Then its outcome, like the child of the Hebrew mother, would surely add something to the extension of His Kingdom. And we should be in the way of fulfilling the chief end of our being in the promotion of His glory.

*He is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.*

THE stringent laws regarding those who contracted the terrible disease of leprosy give us insight, not only into the hideous nature of the disease, but also into the character of that of which throughout the Word of God leprosy is a consistent type.

Both in the Old and New Testament alike, it plainly stands as a picture of human sin. It is significant that while its contagious quality rendered isolation necessary, its first consequence seemed to be Godward. Thus it was to the priest that the afflicted man must show himself. He it was who must judge as to the actual nature of the suspected malady. It was at his hands, as God's representative, that the leper must accept the terrible disabilities attaching to his state. The obvious lesson in all this is that sin's first derangement is in respect of a man's Heavenward relationship. Its greatest consequence is not personal nor even social, but spiritual.

The fact of having to dwell apart from men brought home to the leper the character of his disease as hardly anything else could do. He was cut off from all human fellowship, and shut up to communing with his own heart, and with God. Herein, indeed, lay his one hope of recovery. For God is not confined by any boundary of sanctuary or camp; and it is a quite obvious inference from this record that many an one was Divinely healed in his enforced separation, and as an outcome of his cry to Heaven. Blessed be God! both then and now, when compelled to be "without the camp," one not only finds himself face to face with the consequences of his leprous sin, but with the saving power also of Him Who Himself died there, to redeem and recover lost and helpless men.

**The priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord.**

NO hint is given as to the cure of the leper. That has already been effected in his unrecorded intercourse with God. For only He can stay the deadly plague, and infuse new life and health in him who is marked down as death's prey. Having realized his healing, the leper must offer himself for ceremonial cleansing ere he is restored to his fellows and his home. It must needs be impressed upon him, and upon all who know him also, that only on the ground of accepted sacrifice can forfeited blessings be restored.

The most striking and significant ordinance in connection with the cleansing of the leper, is that which enjoins that blood should be placed upon his hand, his foot, and his ear, and that the holy anointing-oil should likewise be poured upon him. It is as though the restored life must be openly and wholly dedicated to God—the ear to catch His voice, the hand to do His work, and the feet to walk in His way. Given back from the dead, every avenue and energy of the man's being is henceforth claimed by God. His whole future, like his past, is inextricably bound up with the goodness and grace of God. Further, the holy anointing-oil signifies the Divine enduement of the Spirit's power by which the claims and commands of God are alone to be realized and fulfilled. And all this has its living counterpart in the experience of those who have come under the power of the Divine redemption. The glory of the Gospel is that Heaven-healed and Blood-cleansed lepers are permitted the service of the Lord, and are anointed as kings and priests unto God and the Father.



Whosoever toucheth those things shall be unclean.

THE scrupulous care with which contact with uncleanness was to be avoided, and the detailed directions concerning all manner of contingencies, had more than a mere sanitary meaning. In these ways God's people were taught that every sort of uncleanness is a contradiction of that purity which is at once His nature and their pledge. In these ways, too, the contagious character of all that was in opposition to the highest ideals of life was brought home to them, and the necessity of careful avoidance savingly impressed upon their conscience. When it is remembered that every ceremonial prohibition and precept bore a moral meaning, and that all this was part of the elementary education of the people in the things of God, its great importance will be realized.

The abiding lessons for us in these enactments are mainly two. We must by diligent care in regard to our own lives avoid becoming a cause of offence to any. Every sin in us is contagious. The effluence of any life is its largest dimensions. We unconsciously transmit to others our own moral attitudes; and therefore should exercise the most vigorous self-discipline lest we become eternally responsible for the deterioration of those whom, all unconsciously it may be, we are influencing for evil. Again, we must carefully avoid every willing contact with unquestioned uncleanness. A special protection is cast around the one who, in the course of Christian service, must come face to face with things unspeakable. If, however, a man is betrayed into a prurient seeking after such things for the gratification of his own carnal nature, it is at the peril of his soul.



**Thus shall Aaron come unto the holy place.**

SO august in its meaning, as well as so vital in its consequence is the matter of human approach to God, that the most explicit direction was given regarding the representative drawing near to Him on the part of Aaron and his sons. Never was it to be an undeliberated act according to their own emotion or fancy. The way into the holy place was—even for those chosen to exercise their ministry there—hedged about with ordinances, each of which invested with solemn awe every occasion of their ministry. Reverence is always at the foundation of true worship. Unless it permeates every approach to God, all attempted intercourse with Him becomes mere presumption. Past blessing must never be misconstrued as though it rendered lowliness and humility in respect of holy things unnecessary.

This detailed direction as to the manner of coming into the Holy-place, expresses eternal principles for the guidance of the people of God in the most important aspect of their life. Entire reliance upon prescribed sacrifice, as when the shed blood proclaimed propitiation ; the realization of sin forgiven and put away, as when the scapegoat carried the imputed guilt of priest and people into the uninhabited waste ; and the full-hearted offering of prayer and praise, as when the cloud of sweet incense covered the Mercy-seat, are essential to every act of true worship. Above all is the steadying and sanctifying consciousness that all such true worship has a representative value and quality. For in the Holy-place God's priests represent His people. Their prayer is an intercession, and their praise a mediated thanksgiving. The importance, therefore, of ordering our prayer-life with care and without haste cannot be over-emphasized.

**It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.**

ALL the rich jewels of promise of which the Word of God is full, are strung upon a crimson thread. From the earliest days of men's awakening consciousness of God, when innocent victims without blemish were offered in confession of guilt and reliance upon mercy, until that day when His own dear Son, the spotless Lamb of His own providing, was offered as "one sacrifice for sins for ever," this has ever been God's way of declaring Himself to sinful men. Let it never be forgotten that not only the idea but the provision also of sacrifice originated with Him. He Who was the Anti-type of all the earlier offerings declared of His own atoning life and death, "he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father."

Thus it is that His atoning Sacrifice is not merely a legal instrument but an ethical imperative and a spiritual inspiration also. For when supreme love is realized it kindles love, and sets in motion an unfailing impulse to all manner of toil. No one who rightly apprehends the greatness of that unspeakable sacrifice by which Christ made atonement for his sins, can content himself with anything less than a full-hearted endeavour to attain unto holiness and to accomplish the service of God in the world, as the only worthy expression of his eternal indebtedness. It is in the atonement made by Blood that every Christian resolve and energy finds its firm root. And it is in the Blood that every confidence is grounded for the work of life and the ordeal of Judgment.

LEVITICUS xviii. 3.

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do.

IT was necessary that Israel should learn, by direct prohibition and precept, what was implied of present moral action in their ultimate destiny. Chosen as they were to be the people of God, in whom His grace and power was to find manifestation for the enlightenment of the whole world and of all the ages, their character must correspond with their calling. In Egypt they had been accustomed to witness and, possibly, to participate in practices and conduct which they must now for ever abandon. Henceforth their rule of life is not the will of the flesh, but the declared counsel of God. They are learning the eternal lesson that the real nature of man's life is not animal but spiritual, and that its true affinities are not earthward, but Heavenward.

Nothing is so separative as the acceptance of a great moral purpose. The guidance of His Word and Spirit may involve not only in separation from the world, but in actual conflict also. For Christian morality is never merely passive. Thus it is that courage of a high order is demanded of those who profess themselves His people. In the nature of the case it is never easy to stand alone. To the one, however, who steadfastly sets himself to walk, "not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their minds," but "in the light, even as He is in the light," God Himself draws near in an empowering and sanctifying fellowship, which makes the weakest strong and the feeblest victorious.

**We shall keep My Sabbaths, and reverence My Sanctuary.**

PECULIAR importance attaches to God's dwelling-place and His Day. To His people in the wilderness, each stood as a sign of His over-ruling presence, and each was closely identified also with their common lives. The Tent of Meeting, around which their own dwelling-places were pitched, spoke of the nearness of His protection. The weekly recurrence of the Day of Rest in the midst of their toil and journeyings, reminded them of the inextricable closeness in which their ordinary concerns were bound up with their relationship to God. The proximity of the one, and the regular succession of the other of these Divine ordinances, might quite conceivably induce that indifference which is bred of familiarity. In every age this is the danger in which holy things stand. Against this peril Israel is specifically warned in this injunction. Reverence of the Sanctuary and the Sabbath was made a vital condition of God's blessing. How they failed to observe it, and all the disastrous consequence which followed on their failure, is written large in the subsequent history of the nation.

Reverence for the House of God and for His Day is one of the greatest needs of our own age. In nothing is the general defection from God so marked as in this respect. We have become so used to each as to lose sight of their true significance; and so they have ceased to occupy that place in personal and national life which secures to any people the steadfastness of God's favour. A revival of love for God's House and of care in the holy observance of His day will more quickly than any political measure, however well conceived, re-establish the failing greatness of any people.

LEVITICUS xx. 7, 8.

**Sanctify yourselves . . . I am the Lord which sanctify you.**

THERE is no shade of contradiction between this command and this declaration. They are the complement each of the other, representing the human and Divine sides of the holy life. Co-operation is one of the key-thoughts of the Bible. From its earliest opening to its glorious climax God and man are seen in union. True the harmony of their fellowship is often destroyed by sin's discordant voice. But ever and anon the Divine purpose persists ; and the great work of Redemption ultimately effects complete recovery and restoration. Henceforth God is seen to be working His glorious Will uninterruptedly, through human lives yielded to Him in Christ.

All this is enfolded in the conjunction of precept and promise to Israel. As every hurtful thing was put aside by those who honestly sought to live in obedience to His law, God Himself reinforced their obedience, and imparted positive moral character to their energy. His response to loyalty and faithfulness in this respect is always realized in an assertion of His own life. The one who sanctifies himself, often, it may be, at great cost and with no little pain, is sanctified and set apart for His service by the incoming and indwelling of His Spirit. It is always necessary that we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," bending our every energy toward "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." But it is also necessary that at all times we recognize and rest upon the glorious fact of His co-operating power.

**No man that hath a blemish . . . shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord.**

THOUGH born of the priestly tribe, and entitled by virtue of position to the privilege of the Tabernacle service, those who were physically marred were disqualified. They might eat the holy bread, and thus enjoy the sense of personal fellowship with God. But the way to the altar was barred to them. However caused—and there is every reason for inference that the causes might be as various as were the disqualifying marks—no exception was made on behalf of any. Thus is the sacredness of the priestly office guarded.

It is all too possible for one who is truly a child of God so to besmirch his own record as to become unusable by the Lord in respect of such service as the Levitical Priesthood foreshadowed. Indeed, where the blemish which mars his life has constituted, not only an unfaithfulness towards God, but an offence also against Christian morality and conscience, it is but fitting that this Divinely-ordered exclusion should be recognized. Men whose manner of life has brought reproach upon the Name of the Lord, and whose moral lapses have caused the feet of others to stray, must needs go softly all their days. The high altars of God are not for them. It is part of their discipline that prominent place as His representatives is denied them. They may enjoy the consciousness of His forgiveness; but they have forfeited their qualification, and lost their opportunity of the highest service of all. Such is the fearful power of wilful sin in the life of God's chosen people.

**Neither shall ye profane My Holy Name.**

THE honour of God's Name is the responsibility of His people. Unconsciously but certainly, each one who professes His allegiance is stating the case for or against His government, before a world always interested, if not always sympathetic. Did the sense of this solemn responsibility always rest upon us, how differently would life be ordered! With what seriousness should we regard the invasion of careless trivialities, did we but remember their influence upon the Name! With what energy should we wage warfare upon everything in habit and conversation likely to discredit His claims! How circumspectly should we walk in every surrounding, did we but realize that others are taking their measure of Him from us!

If under the old ordinance of precept and prohibition this was so, how much more in this dispensation of grace! If Israel was to be the world's educator in the things of God, how much more surely is the Church, purchased by Christ's own Blood, committed to the task of glorifying His Name among men! The fact is, no man can take His responsibilities too seriously in this respect. Men are apt to imagine that they are of little account in regard to the creation of the world's consciousness of God. It sometimes seems as though their unseen and unconsidered actions are altogether too trifling to be otherwise than negligible in regard to moral influence upon others. In truth, however, every hour is fraught with eternal consequences. No man, however obscure, is without influence. As we alternatively proclaim or profane the Name of God, we are starting or strengthening streams of action in others, whose direction determines their destiny. This is the serious responsibility of all who profess faith in Him.



**We shall dwell in booths seven days.**

THE command that once every year, for the period of a full week, the children of Israel should leave their ordinary habitations and dwell in lodgings made of the boughs and branches of trees, might seem to have little significance in respect of their religious life and worship. Underlying this and every ordinance, however, is to be understood God's interest in their fullest development as His children. Granted this fact, nothing is arbitrary or meaningless. By thus ordering the observance of this Feast, God aimed at the preservation of the pilgrim spirit in His people. Once settled in the land of promise, it would be quite easy for them to lose sight of the true nature of their high calling, and to settle down, in slothful ease and self-pleasing. The annual recurrence, however, of this prescribed sojourn in the tents and booths of pilgrim days kept vividly before them the remembrance of God's goodness, and the sense of His expectation regarding them.

In every age there has manifested itself among the children of God, a disposition to settle down as though this world were their home. What should be an encampment has tended to become an establishment. The acquisition of earthly position has too often dimmed the vision of the Heavenly goal. Thus it is that the providential interventions which break in upon every life from time to time, unite with the precepts of His Word in teaching us that this is not our rest, and that "here we have no abiding city." The old ordinance is past, but its lesson and meaning abides.

**They put him in ward, that the mind of the Lord might be shewed them.**

MOSES had quite early learned the fallibility of mere human judgment. He had discovered the proneness to err which marks even the most sincere mind, and hence did not trust his own conclusions in a matter involving the fate of another. Although his sense of what was due to God had been outraged, he would not impetuously pronounce sentence lest he should go beyond His mind. Such distrust of self and dependence upon the Lord regarding any cause, always receives clear and full intimation of what He would have His servants do. No man ever seeks counsel at His hand in vain. Nor is time wasted which is spent in waiting to discover His pleasure.

The dangers of impetuous judgment are well known to us all. Herein indeed is the history of many a tragedy. Sentence has too often been pronounced on scanty and insufficient evidence, in the heat and indignation generated by some obvious fault ; and a life has, in consequence, been maimed and wrecked, which had been saved had time been taken for prayer and for seeking guidance from above. For the judgments of God are always according to truth. He has scrupulous regard to every extenuating circumstance which is hidden from human eyes. And we are wise only, when, like Moses, we defer all such action as may be our responsibility until God has indubitably made His mind known. That man is most likely to make fewest mistakes who tarries in the Presence Chamber until with unquestioned certainty he has the mind of Christ.

**It is the jubilee.**

OF all sounds in Hebrew ears the trumpet which heralded the Year of Jubilee was the most joyful. For it proclaimed the greatest of all the Feasts, and declared unparalleled benefits on the whole community. It brought liberty to the captives, restoration of every alienated possession to the impoverished, rest from toil to the burdened and heavy-laden, remission of debts to the embarrassed, and the favour of God to all. It was as though in Jubilee Year God crowned His every gift, and brought satisfying assurance of Himself to every heart. Nor is the typical significance of this great event far to seek.

For it is in Christ that our every debt is paid, and our every forfeited blessing restored. He alone recreates broken fellowship between God and man, and readjusts perverted relationship between man and man. It is in Him alone that we have rest from every other labour than that of doing the Divine Will. It is He Who brings us into liberty, not in any merely judicial sense, but as an actual experience in which sin no longer has dominion. As the blessings of the Jubilee Year literally encompassed every need of the whole people, so do the blessings of the Gospel transcend all thought. The half of them has not yet been told. How great then is the folly of those who refuse to hearken to the silver pealing of the trumpet which sounds in every land, declaring God's grace and glory in Christ Jesus ! One day its winsome sound will be silenced by the harsh note of the trumpet of death and judgment.

LEVITICUS xxvi. 3, 14.

**If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them. . . . But if ye will not.**

GOD sets before His people with entire clearness the alternatives of obedience and disobedience, and discloses their ultimate issue. Every promise of spiritual blessing and material prosperity is conditioned upon their fealty. If they will render to Him unquestioned obedience, and will honour Him by trusting Him, nothing of good shall fail to them. By victory over and subjugation of their every foe, it shall be manifested that God is with them, and that they are His people. By His favour they shall be made great. On the other hand, if in stubbornness and pride they refuse to fulfil their loyal obligation to God, not only shall this prosperity be forfeited, but they shall be impoverished and ultimately broken. So vivid are these contrasted destinies that none to whom they were declared could mistake the issue, or fail to realize the urgency of setting himself to the fullest reciprocation of God's good will.

Throughout the Word of God the challenge rings down the ages—"I have set before you life and death : therefore choose life." Destiny is always declared in terms of personal choice. Each man is responsible for the moral quality and influence of his own attitude toward God. Nor is there any uncertainty as to its alternate trend. For the Covenant is firm-based on the Divine character. God never fails to implement His promise to those who meet His simple conditions. Nor does His judgment miscarry in regard to any who despise His Word, and contemptuously take their own way.

**According to the shekel of the sanctuary.**

THE whole of the ordained provision for the redemption of vows emphasizes the necessity of utter thoroughness on the part of every man in his dealings with God. Vows of obligation, covering every realm of life, might be redeemed at a certain value—as, for instance, the obligation of presenting the first-born either of man or beast to the Lord. But in availing himself of this provision under the guidance of the priest, the utmost sincerity was demanded of every man. And in order that no question should arise as to the entire fulfilment of his obligation this uniform standard of value was set up. “The shekel of the sanctuary” was the standard weight by which the silver of every offering was tested. Anything which came short of full value was thus detected and refused.

The lesson which this scrupulously ordered detail conveys to us is as to the necessity of absolute sincerity with God in respect of the fulfilment of our vows and promises. His eye scrutinizes every hidden thing, and His hand weighs the worth of every profession. The standard by which a man's life in its every aspect is judged is none other than Christ Himself. And it is when thus weighed against the “shekel of the sanctuary” that each of us knows himself to be utterly deficient, and realizes how much of the mercy of God he needs to avert the merited rejection of himself and his doings. The truly sincere man is he who prayerfully measures himself day by day by the Divine standard, discovers his deficiency, and strenuously seeks to bring to the Lord an acceptable offering in righteousness.

## NUMBERS i. 3.

### Able to go forth to war in Israel.

IT would almost seem as though no account was taken of the non-combatants in the census of the children of Israel. And it is noteworthy that of those specially singled out for mention among them, almost all are entirely unknown by any accomplishment. That they did effectual service is, of course, obvious; but like many other heroes their deeds are unrecorded and unapplauded. God's judgments and man's are often widely at variance. He marks what human eyes miss of true bravery, and rewards what no one else recognizes as courageous worth. Those whose governing intention is to live as in His sight do not fail of recognition.

The inclusion in the numbering of the people of those only who were "able to go forth to war," suggests that in the Kingdom of God only those who set themselves as good soldiers of Jesus Christ to endure the hardness incident upon His service, are reckoned. Every believer is summoned to battle. The New Testament conception of a saint is that of a soldier. The Church on earth is the Church militant. And the great multitude which no man can number, and which is now before the throne, is composed of those "who overcame by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." He Who is alike in their midst and ours, is revealed as the Captain of the Lord's Host, and as One Who goes forth conquering and to conquer. It is manifestly impossible to be in the train of the Son of God and to avoid conflict. For communion with Him which is the portion of every true believer, is directed toward teaching his hands to war and his fingers to fight. And in His army every one, even the least conspicuous and the weakest, counts.

**Every man . . . shall pitch by his own standard.**

NOTHING in the ordering of the life of the camp was left to chance. Not only was the whole host under the Divine direction, but each man was made to realize individually the Divine interest, and his consequent responsibility. The place of his residence was not left to his own choice. His tent must be pitched in an appointed place, so that each one knew that he was where he found himself by direct Divine ordinance. The moral value of realizing that God was in some way intimately interested in his life, and that he had an appointed place and share in the life of the whole nation, was unspeakably great. It invested his life with a serious importance. It protected him from the snare of carelessness in regard to its commonplace things. It was a constant reminder of his Heavenward relationship and obligation.

Does God so guide His people to-day in regard to such matters as these? Should we look for intimations of His Will in respect of where we should live, and by what standard we should halt? Or is it a degradation of the Divine majesty to associate Him with such trifling concerns of His people? To all such questioning the answer comes—"as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God." And who can tell which are the petty, and which the powerful things of life? The consequence of its simplest steps is frequently out of all proportion to their seeming importance. The one who despises the day of small things, as not calling for the counsel of God, is ultimately certain to be overtaken by the Nemesis of his presumptuous folly.



**I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel.**

THE choice of the Levites for the service of the Tabernacle under Aaron and the priesthood, is full of significance as a picture of the service of God's people in all ages. As they were given wholly to Aaron, so do we entirely belong to our Great High Priest, by right of redemption and by Divine choice. And to every one who has learned to call Him Lord is committed some measure of service in His Kingdom. As with the Levites, so with the servants, of God in this day, entire separation unto their holy calling is a fundamental necessity to its fulfilment. Life for those who recognize that its chief end is the glory of God, must be free from all debilitating and defiling contact with things of lower purpose. Their service is of such a nature as to demand the undivided devotion of a heart free from all absorption in concerns unrelated to the carrying out of the Divine commission. Insulation is the first law alike of electricity and of spiritual power.

The work assigned to the Levites was seldom of a high order in itself. Their responsibility extended merely to the outward things connected with the ordinances of worship. Their duties were of a routine and in the main of an uninspiring character. Their work was in many cases hard and exacting. But it was work for God. The lowliest concern was a vital part of the loftiest of all causes. The mere fact that each man wrought at his appointed duty by the ordinance of Heaven, lifted both him and his work from the level of necessity to that of privilege. And thus it is ever with those who are united to Christ to do His behests.

**Every one according to his service, and according to his burden.**

THE service of the Levites was organized under three divisions, answering to the three families of Kohath, Gershom, and Merari. To each of these was assigned a definite department of work in connection with the Tabernacle, both in respect of its services and of its removal from time to time as the host journeyed. In this way each man knew his peculiar duty, and all confusion was avoided. Similarly each recognized the work of the other as being a complement of his own. Whatever tendency of self-glory might be prompted by national or family spirit was lost in the common animation. For all were under the realization of the Divine control, and all were moved by a united impulse.

It is full of meaning that while the service of the Levites was thus organized and divided, the individual was by no means lost sight of. In the numbering of them each man counted "according to his service and according to his burden." The personal unit was by no means overshadowed by the tribal. It is as though every obscure individual was given his own place, and was thus enabled to realize his own hold upon Heaven's grace. Surely this is one of the things of which we need to be reminded in our own day—that the Church is an aggregation of living units, and that its work is the sum total of personal allegiance and obedience to the Lord. Each of us stands in a unique relationship to Him. Individualism may have its perils. Yet safeguarded according to Divine direction it is the most potent agency of His Will.

Whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his.

THE priesthood was in the main supported by the offerings of the people. Specified parts of the sacrificial victims, and due portions of the dedicated offerings were assigned to the use of Aaron and his sons. They who ministered at the altar lived also of the altar. As their service was altogether sacred, so their support was entirely removed from all secular sources. Through His people God Himself supplied all their need. If their offerings failed the whole economy was impaired. Thus closely did God bind His people to Himself in their responsibility of worship and testimony.

Christ's people make their gifts to Him, Who is their Great High Priest, in expression of gratitude for all that He has done for them. They begin by yielding themselves and their members to Him for His use and service. Unfortunately, however, their first sincerity not infrequently wanes. They are apt to forget that what is given to Him is His by double right. In consequence, they are betrayed into acting at times as though they themselves still enjoyed the control of their lives, their powers, and their possessions. In effect they take out of His hand that which they have put there, and deny Him the practical possession of what should be at His unquestioned disposal. "Ye are not your own" is the clarion call to which His people need to hearken to-day. And as they hearken they hear a gentler Voice which says to their inmost heart: "May I not do what I will with mine own?"

On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel.

THE Aaronic benediction is in its beauty and completeness a prophecy of the blessings of the New Covenant. The light of grace and truth with which the Law was shot through, was but the dawning of the Sun of Righteousness, Whose brightness reached its zenith in His Life, and Death, and Resurrection. Note how prominently the Lord Himself is connected with the blessing of His people. The spoken promise is confirmed by the Living Presence. He Who is enthroned above all Heavens, yet finds His Throne in humble hearts. The neediest of His people find Him close at hand, not in merely mediated words of grace, but in direct energy of love.

The comprehensiveness of the Divine blessing is the answer to every human need and fear. In danger He covenants to keep and protect His people. In the darkness of sin and doubt He promises the clear shining of His face. To those who smart under the consciousness of guilt, His grace to cover all their sin is assured. To those who are mystified and perplexed by life's strange things, who feel themselves encompassed by the chill of loneliness, and are morally handicapped by a sense of spiritual solitariness, the lifting up of His countenance is promised—the victorious realization of His nearness. And to all is declared peace, which means nothing less than the quelling of life's angry storms, the harmonizing of its discords, and the determining of its uncertainties. Surely this is the blessing which alone makes a man rich. Its name is *Christ*.

NUMBERS vii. 5.

**To every man according to his service.**

THE gifts of the princes of Israel, which consisted of wagons and oxen, met a distinct need in respect of the service of the Levites. Part of their work was to carry the various details of the Tabernacle structure and furnishings when the encampment moved forward. Hitherto this burden had been borne upon the shoulders of the men themselves—a task demanding no inconsiderable expenditure of strength and endurance. Now by direct Divine command these wagons and oxen were assigned to them for this work. And it is full of interest to note that this distribution to two of the three main divisions of the Levites was proportioned to the burden they had to bear. The sons of Gershon received only two wagons and four oxen : while the sons of Merari received four wagons and eight oxen. For while the responsibility of the former was for the comparatively light burden of the curtains and coverings of the Sanctuary, that of the latter was for the much heavier load of the boards, bars, and pillars.

The lesson to be drawn from this Divine provision to the Levites is clear and heartening. Resources of strength accord directly with responsibility. “ To every man according to his service ” God ministers just that enduement of wisdom, strength, and grace which is appropriate. Duty and dynamic come to every man hand in hand. With every call to do His service there is unfailing provision of all sufficiency, so that the service may be rendered worthily. This being so, dare we hold back when the Will of God concerning our life-work is revealed ?

**Speak unto Aaron.**

IT is significant that God revealed His Will to Aaron through Moses, and not by direct revelation. He has many ways of declaring His purpose and of fulfilling Himself in the lives of His servants ; and always deals with each of them with a view to securing his highest development. Aaron had to learn that he held his high office on the terms of obedience. Moses had to learn that there were restrictions upon his service, and realms in the life of the people which he personally must not invade. There is Divine blessing to each of these leaders, as well as to the whole nation, in the method which God thus chose for announcing His commandment concerning the details of their worship and service.

God sometimes speaks to His people through the lips of other of His servants. His message is sometimes mediated that we may the better understand its meaning. It is translated into human speech as a concession to the dullness of our apprehension. Men hear in their own tongues the wonderful works of God—works which He has done, and works which He would have them do. Thus there is no possibility of their mistaking or misunderstanding.

How great is the responsibility of him through whom God deigns to speak to others ! In what close communion with Heaven must he live in order to catch the Divine message clearly ! How careful must he be in regard to his own life, lest any uncleanness of the channel should vitiate the stream of truth which flows from the Throne of God and the Lamb !

Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year,  
 . . . the children of Israel abode in their tents.

IT might almost seem as though the journeyings of the people were idle wanderings without plan or purpose. Sometimes halting but for a day, at other times for a year, it might appear as though their life was a mere haphazard. And yet the guiding impulse of every journeying and tarrying was the will and wisdom of God. True their steps had to be taken in faith ; for they could not possibly understand the reason for a prolonged march or a protracted stay. But the steps of faith are always ordered by the Lord to him who delighteth in His way. Patience may often be sorely tried at enforced inactivity. Endurance may be tested to the utmost by the sustained toil of a long march. In the end of the day, however, the Divine wisdom is justified of His children. For they come to know by disciplined impulse and contradicted self-purpose that He leads them by the right way to a city of habitation.

Many of our mistakes in respect of the guidance of God may be clearly traced to the natural haste of our spirits. Finite creatures of a day, we are apt to measure all things by standards of our own judgment, and are prone to conclude that hurry is the prime factor in the carrying out of our life-purpose. We forget at times that we have to do with the God of the Infinite. How many errors, each an embarrassment to the plan of our Guide, might be avoided did we but take time to assure ourselves of the lifting of the cloud, before venturing to move forward in any direction, however promising. Waiting time is never wasted by the one whose eyes are toward the Lord. When the signal for advance is given, he finds that he has been tarrying the while that he might be endued with power from on High.



Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.

IN urging Hobab to remain with them and to journey in their company Moses is all unconsciously anticipating the invitation of Christ's Church to its kinsfolk that are in the world. He looked upon his connection with the son of Raguel as an opportunity for helping him to the enjoyment of God's covenanted blessing. And the form of his urgent request leaves no room for doubt that the possibility of good accruing from union with Israel is entirely dependent upon the Lord, Who has spoken good concerning His people. He would compel him to come into the fellowship of the nation by way of relationship with God.

Our every necessary contact with men should be regarded as an opportunity for impressing the claims of the Lord upon them. If we fail in this respect we fail to realize life's fullest value. Our message is not an invitation to membership of a community as a means to an end, but to fellowship with the living Lord as the only possible way of vital union with His people. While we continually say "Come with us," we as continually mean "Come with us *to Him*." And, as is the passion of our loyalty to the Lord, so will be the urgency and effectiveness of our word. The world will be convinced of His claims and promises when it has reason to believe that we ourselves are convinced that there is no good of any kind apart from Him. "Come" is His own word of winsome invitation, upon the warrant of which our own faith has ventured. We learn to re-echo it in His own tones as we company with Him.

Who shall give us flesh to eat?

THERE is an incisive and illuminating comment on this episode in Israel's history, in which the Psalmist, reviewing it in the light of its outcome, declared that while God gave them their request He sent leanness withal into their souls. Not that their desire for flesh to eat was necessarily wrong in itself. As an expression, however, of dissatisfaction with God's provision, and of revolt against His providence, it had in it every element of destruction. God does not always rebuke His people by direct denial. He often allows the effect of their departure from Him to work unhindered in them. Their sin is often its own punishment. The deterioration of life which ensues, and which eventually disables them from even recognizing anything better than that for which they have bartered God's good gifts, is the awful Nemesis of their choice.

It is not too much to say that all who, like Israel, fail to recognize God's provision as His best for them, and seek after another gift which is but the second best, are laying up for themselves an experience of leanness, dissatisfaction, and disillusion. We may gain the world, and lose everything of true worth in the process. We may acquire seeming importance among men, while losing real influence. We may become prosperous, while our souls are almost petrified. For to turn from the highest for anything else involves a loss to the soul of that which only Divine grace and the bitter penitence of a renewed life can repair. And even then the repair is only partial. Something has been for ever forfeited.

**Butb be not spoken also by us?**

THE marriage of Moses furnished Miriam and Aaron with an opportunity for public dissent from his hitherto unchallenged authority. And the whole episode is full of grave warning. The punishment of the offenders might seem to be altogether out of proportion to the offence, were it not borne in mind that unity of heart and purpose between all who are engaged together in the service of God is of supreme importance. Anything which mars or breaks it can never be regarded as trivial; since it thwarts the will of God, and diffuses an influence which weakens His holy cause.

Pride is the root of all that disturbs the harmony of the united life of God's people. Their concerted witness to the world necessitates humility of mind which recognizes at once His sovereign right in the use of His servants, and their individual unfitness apart from grace. When this spirit is lost, envy and jealousy readily spring up as a root of bitterness; and many are defiled. More harm is done to the work of God by internal unfaithfulness of this sort than by the external opposition of its avowed foes. Nor is the guilt of the one who hinders the progress of the Kingdom by failure in humility, any less than was that of Miriam and Aaron. As with them, sooner or later the fault recoils upon themselves. There is that akin to leprosy in the consequence of all such defection. For it puts the offenders entirely out of communion with God and with their fellows. It is never a light thing to shatter the unity of the Spirit and to violate the bond of peace.

**Let us go up at once, and possess it ; for we are well able to overcome it.**

THE essential difference between the general body of the spies, and the two who brought back a favourable and encouraging report, is in the place which God occupied in their respective outlook and understanding of things. The majority saw the good of the land, its fruitfulness, and all its desirable features. But they saw also the difficulties in the way of its conquest. And these so filled their vision as to obscure everything else, and completely to stifle every courageous impulse. The two, on the other hand, did not underestimate the difficulties of the situation. Nor did they fail to see the giants in possession. But they saw God also ! Past experience of His guiding hand encouraged them in the belief that He Who had brought them so far would not fail them in this their greatest task. Hence their encouraging report and inspiring challenge to immediate conquest. The outcome of their faith and loyalty is the entire history of the nation.

Herein are illustrated the possible conflicting views of life which divide men. Some see God through its obvious difficulties ; and consequently see Him but dimly and afar off. Others look at the difficulties through God ; and see them altogether negligible. These are the heroes of faith, who in every age have led the people of God to victory. God is to them a present help. Because He is at their right hand they are not moved from their steadfast purpose. They know Him and hence do exploits. Life is not divested of its difficulties to them, but only of its power to dishearten. For confidence in God, born of experience of His faithfulness, forbids all doubt as to ultimate success, when every step is taken in faith and obedience.

I have pardoned according to thy word.

THE sin of His people is never a trifling matter with God, to be forgiven by a word, and passed over without discipline. When Israel refused to go up to the conquest of Canaan, thus thwarting His purpose and flouting His command, His anger was righteously kindled and their just sentence was declared. While the intercession of Moses prevailed to avert the judgment and destruction of the people, and while the Divine pardon was unequivocally proclaimed, the consequence of their defection and rebellion was by no means remitted. Only by their exclusion from the land of promise could the enormity of their offence be brought home to them and to succeeding generations. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is a fact which most surely impresses the conscience of men in the school of pain.

How greatly Israel needed the cleansing fires of God's discipline is seen in the almost light-hearted way in which the people received His word of pardon. No sooner is the seriousness of their fault made manifest than they declare their intention of invading the land; and actually presume to make the attempt. And once again the disfavour of God is made known in their defeat by the Amalekites. For He will not suffer them to play fast and loose with His commands in any such fashion. True penitence of spirit is never so evidenced. No man has learned the moral lesson conveyed in the meeting of his failure by Divine forgiveness, on the merits of the intercession of Another, until he has gladly yielded himself to Heaven's leadership. Then, and then only, as a conquered man can he go forward to conquest.

NUMBERS xv. 30.

**The soul that doeth ought presumptuously . . . shall be cut off.**

THE directions under which the life of God's people was to be lived were so ample and comprehensive of every contingency that this prohibition of self-willed departure is readily understood. It was not merely that the non-observance of any single precept or restriction was in itself serious—though each Divine ordinance was self-justifying. The inwardness of the offence lay in its expression of disloyalty toward God, and of revolt against His authority. Defiance of His order and contempt of His commandment could not but merit condign punishment. It is a mistake to speak of men as "breaking God's law." It is they themselves who are broken upon it when they presume to set up for themselves other standards of life and conduct, just as a wave is broken into spray upon a rock.

There is a sense in which men sin presumptuously, when they embolden themselves in evil-doing, relying the while upon the mercy and graciousness of God. Knowing His covenanted forgiveness, they act as though this gave them free licence to sin. They turn the grace of God into lasciviousness ; imagining that they have but to utter a formula of confession—which cannot but be lacking in saving sincerity—in order to avert from themselves the consequence of their transgression. That such an unworthy attitude results in utter deterioration of soul is readily understood. The man who is guilty of it is, in the nature of the case, "cut off" from a fellowship he is unable to appreciate.

**And he stood between the dead and the living.**

NO other recorded event in the life of Aaron so vividly sets forth the solemn possibilities of his office as this one. For he is seen to be in touch with the issues of life and death, by reason of his dual relationship with a holy God and an arrant people. He is able to bring to an end a devastating plague which followed upon the sin of the nation, by standing in the breach between an outraged Heaven and its sinful dependants. His prayer is an expression of confidence in the Divine mercy, and his service a mediation of the Divine character. While he pleads the one before God, he presents the other before His people. Thus he seeks to turn their hearts back to their true allegiance, by arousing within them sanctifying memory of their indebtedness and dependence. And thus the plague was stayed.

No man can lightly regard his commission to a work which has mysterious influence upon the eternal destiny of others. Its issues are altogether too important to admit of any trifling with its duties. For, on the one hand, souls are in peril, and, on the other, God is dependent for a justification of His righteousness upon the faithfulness of His servant. Did we always realize this, what an influence it would have on our outlook and attitude toward life. Instead of regarding it in any sense as an opportunity for self-pleasing and trifling indulgence, we should jealously guard its every moment from everything unworthy, and take the utmost care that all other interests are superseded by the importance of its main purpose and chief end. For all the Lord's people are His priests in the midst of a dying world.



## NUMBERS xvii. 8.

**The rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded.**  
THE miraculous blossoming of Aaron's rod was both an authentication to the nation of the Divine choice of the Levites as God's servants, and a confirmation to every member of that tribe of the Divine approval. Henceforth there could be no murmuring on the part of the people, nor any holding back upon the part of those so chosen. For God had declared his mind in indisputable fashion and with convincing force.

Life and fruitfulness are at all times the attesting marks of consecration. God responds to the faith of His people by asserting His own life within them, quickening their every dead energy into new being. Mysteriously, but with reality which admits of no contention, the dry rod begins to pulsate with living power when it is laid up "in the Tabernacle, before the Testimony." It is transformed into a fruit-bearing branch of an invisible Tree of Life. Its vital union with the source of life cannot be seen nor understood of any. But the resultant fragrance and fruitfulness all can appreciate. Nor can any deny its altogether supernatural character. For on no other assumption but that of imparted life from above can it be explained. Thus it is that the Word of Christ concerning His followers is fulfilled—"herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit," and so "all men shall know that ye are My disciples." While it is not within our power to command the Divine energy which makes for fruit-bearing, it is our part to co-operate with Him Who calls us to His service. In so doing, we shall never lack irrefutable witness to acceptance and well-pleasing.

I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

IN nothing is the separation of the priesthood unto its holy service so clearly seen as in its necessary surrender of all property rights. A priest could not hold any land or earthly treasure either by acquisition or inheritance. Assured of his support from the freewill offerings of the people, he was thus liberated from all concern of secular things. Life to him began and ended with the service of God's House. No competing claims upon his thought and powers were allowed to share his interest. And in this entire freedom from all that commonly engrosses men lay his effectiveness as God's representative and minister. The obvious deprivation involved by this prohibition was abundantly made up by the reality and quality of his spiritual privilege and possession. For he came into unique relationship with God, which qualified him for largest influence upon the life of the nation. It is always the man who is independent of the world by reason of his devotion to "the things which are above," who most surely helps the world to realize their importance.

How great are the compensations of the servant of God who is content to count the world well lost for the glory of His service! Fellowship with the Lord Himself brings into his life treasure compared with which everything of earthly sort is negligible. Purer delights are his than worldly possessions ever bring. There is a sense in which it is true to say that God cannot be known thus until His servants have willingly renounced their right to the so-called good things of the world, and have separated themselves from their allurements by entire self-dedication to the highest things of all. How rich is such an one!

NUMBERS xix. 2.

**This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord hath commanded.**

CEREMONIAL uncleanness was contracted by the merest contact with things dead or defiled. A man had but to touch a dead body or an unclean person, and he was in consequence himself rendered unholy. With minute exactness the ritual to be observed in his cleansing and subsequent restoration to the fellowship from which this contracted defilement excluded him, was declared from Heaven. Its importance, therefore, both as an ordinance and a type, is obvious. That such a seemingly slight thing as accidental contact with unholiness should be the subject of Divine concern and direction testifies to the gravity of all that is implied of moral significance and import in this circumstance. Its clear teaching is as to God's view of sin, and the inability of Divine love to overlook even its trivial forms in the lives of His people.

One of the things which the indwelling Holy Spirit teaches the believer is the necessity of carefully guarding against the possibility of defilement. It is indeed a positive instinct of the new life to recoil from all that is morally unclean. For while under the dispensation of grace no moral stain attaches to anything unwitting and involuntary, yet the danger of wilful trifling with sin is always real. And just as under the old Covenant the observance of the cleansing ordinance was immediate upon a man's discovery of his condition and need, so now the one who finds himself defiled and stained must at once appropriate afresh the Divine Sacrifice. There is no other way of life than this.

Would God that we had died.

THE petulant murmuring of the Israelites, and their faithlessness under the trifling test of thirst, is but an illustration of the fitfulness by which they so often provoked the Lord during their pilgrim days. Despite all that He had done for them, they constantly dishonoured Him by distrusting Him when things seemed to be against them. Such murmuring was indicative of the untamed self-will which was yet their strongest impulse. Their childish dissatisfaction with God's ways is a sinister reflection upon the governing attitude of their hearts towards Him. And what tremendous consequences it brought, both upon themselves and their leader, who was betrayed in the heat of his indignation into an act of presumption, which involved the forfeiture of the crown of his long hope.

An undisciplined spirit is prone to rush to foolish conclusions and to utter rash words under the stress of disappointment which, in itself, may be trifling, or inconvenience which is in reality negligible. Hot-headed men are apt to be singularly blind and unreasoning. Their impetuous exaggeration of speech or action always betrays a lack of true discernment of God's ways. It is only the altogether childish Christian who is ready to desert his allegiance in an angry moment when he is ruffled or thwarted. The childlike believer is content to trust Him if necessary in defiance of his own reasonings. He knows that his ultimate security is nothing less than God's own character, and is content to leave things at that. Of such, indeed, is the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Toward the sunrising.**

THIS is more than a geographical note. While it records the direction taken by the people after their wonderful experience of God's forgiving and delivering power at the place of the lifting up of the brazen serpent, it has also a spiritual significance of first importance. Sin's dread consequence had been averted by sovereign grace. The place of death had become the place of life. Sorrowing had been turned to rejoicing. God's favour had displaced His frown. With quickened faith and a priceless experience to inspire them, His people now moved forward under His leadership "toward the sunrising," every ray of which was prophetic of the glory which yet awaited them.

All this is more than history. It is an allegory of the Christian life. Every pilgrimage toward the Eternal Sunrising begins at the Cross. Its impulse and hope are rooted in personal re-creating experience of the atoning Sacrifice and cleansing Fountain. The Cross stands for ever between us and all the condemnation of the past. Behind is the radiance of forgiveness, and ahead is the foreglow of all that is laid up for them that fear Him. The pilgrim-way inevitably lies through a wilderness always dangerous and unkindly. But the wilderness is never the true epitome of God's providence and plan. The far distance of its horizon is but the Divine arrangement to secure the full intent of all life's powers. And even though a deep River flows between us and the Sunrise Land, it cannot dim the hope which His own promise has lighted. The path of the just leads right onward through the desert, and is as a shining light, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."

**I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord . . . to do less or more.**

THE story of Balaam is not merely preserved to us as a historic link, but as a serious warning also. It illustrates the peril of unsuspected insincerity, of trifling with God's Word and with conscience, and of the despotic tendency of self-interest. For it is the record of a man originally visited and enlightened by God, strongly tempted in the realm of his spiritual professions, and ultimately fascinated by the promised rewards of unfaithfulness. In uttering such a lofty sentiment as this one, Balaam was not a deliberate hypocrite. He honestly meant these words, and it is safe to assume that they expressed his deepest purpose. His tendencies and impulses, however, were stronger than his ideals and aspirations. Gain had a tighter hold upon him than godliness. Hence his defection from God, and the striking moral contradiction between this declaration of loyalty to Heaven and his subsequent actions.

Such a story helps us to see to what lengths trifling insincerities in regard to Heavenward obligations may lead men. It urges us to avoid the beginnings of unreality, and warns us that fervour without faithfulness is nothing but destructive self-fascination. Even Christians may disregard the promptings and protests of conscience until it is utterly silenced. Moral sensibility may be resisted until it is ruined. And the consequence of such a process is beyond measure. The ultimate influence of the one who began by making such a splendid profession of faith, as did Balaam, is one of the darkest records of Israel's history.

**Wath Be spoken, and shall Be not make it good?**

MANY a true word is spoken by a man of untrue life. The fact that spiritual perception does not in itself affect character is at once an explanation of the utterance of such a testimony as this by Balaam, and a warning to all whose moral growth does not keep pace with their apprehensions of truth. In regard to spiritual things seeing must not be confused with being. It is the greatest condemnation of Balaam, and of any man, that he should hold the truth in unrighteousness, and should venture to proclaim it to others when it has lost power over his own life. For the sword of God is two-edged, and none can avoid the consequence of unfaithfully handling it.

The force of this word both awes and encourages us. It declares that from God's judgment upon sin there is no appeal. His nature makes any deviation from its declared consequences impossible. Hence the folly of trifling with issues which are as certain as the Word of God can make them. At the same time His faithfulness gives an interpretation to His promises of blessing which lifts each one of them into the realm of indubitable certainty. The promises of God are the pledges of His being. Though their immensity often staggers our feeble faith, we rest in the assurance that their fulfilment is contingent, not upon any worthiness of ours, but upon His own character. It is part of the Christian creed that "He cannot deny Himself." Upon His Word, as upon solid rock, we may surely build for eternity. For no word of His is void of power.



**The Lord hath kept thee back from honour.**

BALAK'S anger is easy to understand. He had formed a tolerably accurate estimate of the character of the man with whom he had to do ; and had, not without reason, concluded that this prophet of the Lord could be bought. For indeed it was only Divine intervention which restrained Balaam from yielding to the importunities of the king whose wages of unrighteousness tempted him. Balak recognized that some strange power had overcome Balaam's cupidity and had thus thwarted his scheme for the cursing of Israel. And he rightly attributed it to the Lord. In angry recrimination he taunts the prophet with the cost of his quixotism, in the hope of inducing him to reverse what he has declared. His cynical reference to " the Lord " is in keeping with his actions throughout this episode. But saying what he did, he spoke more truly than he knew.

Nothing is more certain than that God's protective ministry often keeps His servants from earthly honour. Obscurity and poverty form a kindlier environment for the believer's true life than do publicity and affluence. Many an one is Divinely kept back from receiving worldly recognition as the only way of keeping him in the faith of Christ. Not every one who has found his soul can keep his head. The servants of God are in most peril when perchance they become popular with those who are indifferent to His claims. There are some flowers which bloom best in the shade. The fact that this word of Balak's is true in regard to many another beside Balaam, is no reflection upon God's goodness to those who serve Him. It is rather a manifestation of His wisdom and love.

**He was zealous for his God.**

THE blessing of Phinehas was indeed great. For God confirmed him in a covenant of peace and of an everlasting priesthood, the blessings and privileges of which extended to his descendants. In him thus began a stream of influence which was unending and immeasurable. It took its rise in an act of individual faithfulness to God, of which a full record has been here given for the inspiration of all who have come after him. It is evident that he cherished a passionate zeal for God's glory, and in consequence manifested deep indignation against anything which violated it. It was the courageous action of a single-minded man which earned for him the signal favour of God. It manifested his fitness for the entrustment of His service. And in every age God honours the one who is usable.

Zeal in itself is not necessarily laudable. Indeed, the zeal of many an one has been his undoing. As an abstract quality it is potentially without virtue. It is the molten metal of the spirit which needs to be carefully directed into right channels lest it spread disaster. When controlled by the high motive of concern for the interests of God's Kingdom, it is the greatest force of which we have any knowledge. And it ever brings to those who expend it at personal cost with this intent, the same Divine reward as came to Phinehas. For the crown of zealous service is the commission to more and yet greater service. Zeal tempered with humility, and Heaven-controlled, is the secret of all impressive influence which abides for ever.

**These were the numbered of the children of Israel.**

IN this long and detailed record of the census which was taken at God's explicit command, one fact stands out conspicuously. It is the mention by name of obscure persons of whom nothing whatever is known. Their life and work is without any record, beyond the mere mention made here. They were the rank and file of the army, the unnoticed and unknown of the nation. And yet the fact that their names are given in this record seems to point to the fact that each had his own place in the Divine ordering of Israel's life. The Great Father of the family took note of each one. Every life was lived under His care ; and though its deeds were not chronicled, its place in the sum total of the nation's activity was unquestioned. The God of Israel is for all time the God of the individual.

To large numbers of us life becomes growingly anonymous. Few only are called to leadership. Our deeds find no place in any temple of fame ; and often, indeed, we are tempted to look upon ourselves as being of little value, and our lives as of small account. This is a perilous state, which, not infrequently, has led men into moral carelessness, from the consequence of which there has been no recovery. We are, however, safeguarded against this insidiousness by the remembrance of these inconspicuous men who yet find place in the roll of God's people. Life is for all time lifted out of the commonplace as its ordinary days and years are lived in the sanctifying consciousness of His concern.

**Moses brought their cause before the Lord.**

SELF-DISTRUST in matters of judgment is a sure evidence of growth in grace. Moses forbore to exercise the authority vested in him as leader of the people, although there is no hint that his decision on the matter in question would not have been loyally accepted. He had learned that the only safe course for the avoidance of unlooked-for pitfalls, was to seek God's mind in the full confidence of its disclosure to honest sincerity. He had schooled his natural impetuosity to patience; and, hence, gave no hasty decision which, while magnifying his office for the moment, might conceivably bring dishonour upon the Lord in the future. In nothing does His greatness as a leader appear so splendidly as in the consistency with which He maintained this attitude of self-abnegation and prayerful confidence in God.

It is no degradation of the Divine Majesty to regard God as being sufficiently interested in the small concerns of our life and service, to give direction concerning even the smallest of them to those who seek Him. Indeed His greatness is never so clearly recognized by His children as when they have some living experience of His intervention in the causes which they submit to Him. For He unquestionably still ministers wisdom to the opened and surrendered mind. It is of the essence of His Gospel that He controls the mental and spiritual faculties of His people, and guides them to a right judgment. How foolish then of any of us to take matters into our own hands, and to assume self-sovereignty over the issues of our responsible choices as from time to time they present themselves! Our only safeguard from perilous error is to bring every cause before the Lord.

**My offering—My bread—My Sacrifices.**

COUNTLESS intimations impressed upon the minds of the children of Israel the great fact that they belonged to God. Again and again by direct word and illustrative ritual they were made to realize that they were in no sense their own. Life was ordered for them by protective prohibition and precept. They could not get away from evidences of God's concern and care, even if they would ; and their growing consciousness of His ownership conditioned their effective witness to the surrounding peoples. Hence in the matter of their religious worship they are taught that they can offer nothing to the Lord but that which is already His. They may bring their sacrifices of meat-offering and meal-offering, but in so doing they give to Him only that which is His own. Indeed, the very impulse of their drawing near to Him is but responsive. It originates in His love. They are dependent, both for the will to draw near, and for the gifts with which they enter His courts, upon Him alone.

Over every redeemed life is invisibly written the Divine assurance and witness—"Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." All that we have and are belongs to Him by right of creation and redemption. Still further it is His also by the sincere self-committal of each one who apprehends his own salvation in Christ Jesus. And that one who thus recognizes God's ownership not only as an article of faith, but as the governing fact of his life, has learned the initial secret of all true happiness and effectiveness.

NUMBERS xxix. 16, 19, 22, etc.

**Beside the continual burnt-offering.**

THROUGHOUT this entire chapter these words run as a refrain. Every ordinance which is here prescribed is vitally linked to the burnt-offering. It is as though the greater includes the less ; for the burnt-offering signifies the entire consecration to God of the lives of His people. Wholly surrendered to Him in a covenant of daily renewal, all else with which they from time to time worship and serve Him is but an expression of the larger dedication.

Inconstant consecration is unfortunately common among those who profess allegiance to the Lord. They begin well, with the honest determination of entire devotion to His Will and service. Failure however to renew their vows daily—not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth—robs their original intention of abiding force. They may be found busily engaged in one form or another of Christian and social service, but it is not with “ the continual burnt-offering.” Hence it is without spiritual value and meaning. Such, though invariably busy, inevitably become barren. For hands may be full when hearts are strangely empty. Activity may altogether outstrip devotion. It is only too possible that a man may be a keeper of the vineyards, who, in the depth of his soul, has to confess—“ Mine own vineyard have I not kept.” Nothing whatever can take the place of that continual renewing of love to the Lord, which finds its expression in the burnt-offering. Without it, seeming gain is actual loss. For what does anything matter in comparison of the keeping of God’s commandment and the securing of His pleasure ?

If a man vow a vow unto the Lord . . . he shall not break his word.

STEADFASTNESS is always the test of reality in regard to spiritual professions. Under the impulse of some strong influence men frequently make vows of the most sacred character, only to find their fulfilment a matter of such difficulty and inconvenience that they cannot implement them. Things are apt to look different in the cold grey light of the morning to what they seemed in the artificial glow of the previous evening. Many an one has discovered, to the loss of his own self-respect, that his vows of loyal obedience and utmost service have been made without due consideration of all that they involved. He did not intend to be insincere, but simply miscalculated his powers. What such defection means to men themselves, and to the cause of the Lord, is indicated by this stern command. It is infinitely better never to vow than to fail of whole-hearted attempt to carry out the obligation.

Christ has emphasized this same precept in His unwillingness to accept unconsidered discipleship. He frankly disclosed the cost and the issues of a faithful following of Himself. Never did He make the pathway seem less narrow by one inch, nor less rugged by one degree than it actually is. Nor did He hide the inevitableness of the Cross in the lives of those who were minded to identify themselves with Him. It is by His counsel that men who have heard the call, and whose hearts leap up in response, sit down first and count the cost. For in His conception of life he who breaks his word by looking back "is not fit for the Kingdom of God."



**Levy a tribute unto the Lord . . . the Lord's tribute.**

THE inculcation of practical expression of indebtedness to the Lord as a habit of life was part of the elementary moral education of His people. The tribute which He commanded should be levied upon men of war who returned from their conflicts laden with spoil, was to be their definite ascription to Him of the glory of their victory. They might not enjoy for themselves all that they captured. For they were but partners. His share, Who had taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight, must be given to Him. The levying of the Lord's tribute was not to be left to any haphazard chance emotion, but was rather to be the first concern of each one. Nor was its quantity to be determined according to each man's mind. All was the subject of definite ordinance, any breach of which was a serious sin against the Lord God.

How often this matter of giving to the Lord His rightful tribute is disregarded by His people ; or is so carelessly carried out as to be unworthy of Him and of them ! Those who order their offerings with scrupulous care, making the Lord's tribute the first charge upon income and possession, are conspicuously few in any community. Once of old He charged His people with robbing Him in respect of tithes and offerings, and urged upon them the necessity of reparation if they would realize the Heavenly blessing. Does He not speak similarly to us to-day ? And is not spiritual poverty often conditioned by the irregularity and paucity of our tribute ?

**Be sure your sin will find you out.**

SIN is a tracking pursuer, an implacable foe, a destructive force, which follows the man who gives himself to its impulses. Yet it is by no means true that in this life men are always overtaken by the consequence of moral misdoings. Indeed, the contrary would often appear to be the case ; for sin brings to many an one a measure of the material prosperity, and all which it affords, for which it would seem he had bartered his birthright. It is in the man himself that sin's effects are indelibly registered. Power of thought and memory becomes impaired. Mind becomes disabled and intellect confused. Paralysis of will and vitiation of desire sets in. Conscience is desensitized ; and ultimately the body also becomes utterly defiled. Sin's outward consequence may be escaped, but its penalty is unavoidable.

In any or all of these ways sin finds men out in the hour of newly-awakened desire for God. When under the influence of His Holy Spirit they are confronted with the possibility of new life, and faced with a reconstructive crisis which demands the courage of the pure-hearted, then sin's power to track men down and to find them out is manifested. For it is then that there appears within a man an unsuspected malignity which defiles his outlook, and an unanticipated loss of capacity which mocks at his desire. He discovers himself to be the product of his past. And how great is his hopelessness until he realizes that there is a more persistent force than sin ! It is the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places.

COMPLETE extermination of everything which might be a temptation to sin was enjoined upon Israel as the land of Canaan was entered. The idols of the nation then in possession must be destroyed root and branch, lest their defilements should fascinate God's people to their destruction. They were too recently themselves come out of Egypt to make anything like trifling with idolatries a safe thing. Their own latent instabilities were too many to allow of any trifling with danger. Protective in its first meaning as this injunction is, it sheds a revealing light upon the character of God, and reflectively also upon the ideal character of those who serve Him. For while it shows that He Who is light can have no fellowship with darkness, it reveals a love which is keenly solicitous for His people's welfare, and expresses a wisdom which all subsequent history justifies. It is the nature of God which makes such a command as this entirely necessary as a condition of His people's fellowship with Him.

"No compromise with evil" is the note which rings throughout the Old and New Testaments alike. Christ can have no concord with Belial. The Lord of Heaven has nothing in common with the god of this world. Conformity, therefore, on the part of His people to the fashions and customs of an age which is frankly idolatrous is an utter denial of the faith. Nor is merely passive separation from the world a sufficient response to His claim. So long as opposition to His Truth lifts its head, His servants are committed to conflict.

**When ye come into the land of Canaan.**

HOW minute were the directions given for the settlement of the tribes in the Land of Promise. None were permitted to take up residence in such part of the country as might appeal to them. Nor was there to be any contention between them in regard to the possession of places which might seem more desirable than others. By Divine commandment the land was divided off, and to each tribe and family was allotted his exact location. Each therefore held his territory on direct tenure from God. To each was given the guardian inspiration of a Divine interest. Thus more vividly than ever was the fact of God's leadership and control brought home to the people when the goal of their long pilgrimage was now in sight. Such was the ordering of events that none could have any doubt but that He Who had brought the nation "out of Egypt," Himself brought it also "into Canaan."

There is but one place in life for each one who seeks to live under the Fatherly care of the Most High. It is the place of His appointment. There is but one place in which each man is secure from overthrow by his enemies. It is that place in which he stands "perfect and complete in all the Will of God." For the carrying out of the duties of that position he may claim with certainty the enduement of Divine grace. In all its obligations he may assure himself of the Divine favour, and in all its opportunities he may realize the inspiration of the Divine guidance. To know thus, despite every apparent contradiction which tests faith and challenges reason, that life is of God's direct planning, brings a sense of security and a peace of heart which nothing else can ever give.

**Six cities shall ye have for refuge.**

THE appointment of the Cities of Refuge is an illustration of God's care for those of His people who had unwittingly taken human life. They were so placed geographically that one of them was readily accessible from almost any part of the land. The roads which led to them were, by ordinance, kept clear, so that a hunted man should have no interference in his flight for safety. The elders of each city were under Divine charge to admit without question all who presented themselves, and to protect under the seal of the oath of God those who put their trust in His Covenant in the hour of their need. From that moment the pursuer was baffled in his purpose. The manslayer abode safely under the shadow of the Almighty.

All this is a wonderful foreshadowing of the salvation which, in Christ Jesus, is available to all who discover themselves to be under the guilt of sin, and are in danger of being overtaken by its consequence. If a man flees to Christ he is assured of welcome without question, of protection without upbraiding, and of liberty without fear. And how available Christ is to men in whatever position they find themselves! None is too far off in the land of sin and death to be other than near to the open gate of Heaven's salvation. Once faith has stepped over mercy's threshold, the sin-haunted man abides in the confidence that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Written in letters of gold above the eternal Refuge for sinful mankind is the heartening assurance: "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

Every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.

UNDER no consideration was the land to be alienated from the possession of God's people. Divided to them by His Divine command, in such a way that each was appointed to a place which had its purpose and value in the overruling Will, it was a sacred trust that every man should keep that which had been committed to him. Neither by sale nor intermarriage was any part of it to pass into other hands. In other words God's determination of each man's abiding place and inheritance was final. To attempt to go beyond His Word was an unfaithfulness which could only recoil upon the one who so presumed.

The New Testament expansion of this Old Testament ordinance is in the injunction: "Be content with such things as ye have, for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The one who loyally accepts His ordering of life, and humbly seeks therein to glorify Him, may not always seem to gain life's prizes. He may appear to dwell in circumstances of great restriction; but he has at all times a compensating sense of God's presence and favour. Thus fortified, the weakest of His people is strong. Life can bring nothing to them from out the unknown which can for a moment stagger them. Present and future alike are interpreted in the light of the unfailing companionship of the Lord. In such bright light the world loses all its glamour. And none who have companied thus with Him would exchange their lot for aught in life. In just the place of His appointment they find complete satisfaction.

**Because he bath wholly followed the Lord.**

THAT Caleb "wholly followed the Lord" is not necessarily a declaration of perfect attainment on his part, but of perfect aim. It declares the real passion of his life. He did not fear unpopularity nor to be in a minority. Like most single-minded men he had to stand single-handed in circumstances of utmost difficulty. He had, however, learned the secret of endurance, "as seeing Him Who is invisible." Already in that dim far-off time he anticipated the spirit of Him Who in the days to come "despised the shame" in the fulfilment of His Divine mission.

How great in the present day is the need of this same spirit of moral courage! In ordinary life we see men compromising in moral issues lest they should incur social unpopularity. In politics we see men voting for measures of which conscience disapproves, in order to avoid exclusion from a party. In business we see men withholding allegiance from God in case other men should withhold commerce from them. And even in the Church of Christ we see preachers and people unfaithful to the Living Word both in proclamation and practice, in order to avoid an unfavourable verdict on the part of frankly indifferent worldlings. Surely the age calls for the courageous virtue of Caleb. And how rich are they, who, like him, are fearless in following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth! They may be—and actually are—few in number. But even one such man, with God, is a majority over every opposition.



He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness . . . thou hast lacked nothing.

FULL of tender sympathy are all God's providences. Throughout all the forty years in the Wilderness His people lacked for nothing. His leadership was a constant expression of sympathetic understanding of their capacity. While they had no overplus, they yet had no lack. Their only failures and defeats were those which followed on the fluctuations of their faith. And by the discipline of victory and defeat alike they came to know God. If they experienced anything of His wrath they learned much more of His wealth. If they tasted His judgments they came also to know the abundance of His mercy. Thus they were prepared for Canaan.

It was God's knowledge of them, however, rather than their acquired knowledge of Him, upon which Moses laid emphasis in His parting words. Not only did He know them with the inherent knowledge of the Creator, but with the intimate insight of One Who had companied with them in all the days of their pilgrimage. He had been behind and before them in cloud and fire, and had come to have a knowledge of them as Friend of friend, and as Father of child. And yet He still loved them. His patience, though often strained by their ingratitude, never snapped. At the end of the long travel-days they are as dear to Him as in the days of His first choice. Such is the love of our God! What a joy to us to know with Israel that He Whom we so unworthily and unfaithfully serve understands entirely, and makes fullest allowance for all that of which we are guiltily ashamed. He knoweth our walking and our halting through this wilderness, and He knoweth, too, "our frame, and remembereth that we are dust."

**We shall not fear them: for the Lord your God he shall fight for you.**

THE certain necessity of having to fight for possession of the land was, in no degree, hidden from the people. It was made abundantly plain to them that their occupation would be contested by the original inhabitants, and they were forewarned as to the sharpness of the conflict and the strength of the foe. Lest their hearts should faint at this prospect, the all-sufficient promise of God's own Presence to guide, help, and fight with them was declared. Herein alone lay the secret of a courage which should not fail though opposed to such great odds. For Israel was, from the point of view of experience, entirely incompetent successfully to combat the war-like nations which dwelt in Canaan. When, however, the God of all power is allied to the weakness of an obedient people, there can be but one issue of the contest.

It is always the consciousness of God's Presence which takes away fear from the hearts of His people. The Lord's foes and theirs are many and subtle and strong; and their hearts might well fail them were it not for the assurance of their Heavenly alliance. And yet it is through them that God purposes victory. He "teaches their hands to war and their fingers to fight." It is their feet which must tread upon the lion and adder and dragon. Yet so close is their union with Him that it is always His strength manifested in their yielded members which secures victory. If we always realised this how different would be our common attitude to opposition.

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently.

NOTHING of importance is ever accomplished at haphazard except calamity. When men sleep the enemy invariably sows tares in their fields. Hence it is that in his epitome of God's dealings with Israel, Moses emphasized the necessity of personal diligence in regard to maintaining that fellowship with Him without which any life is barren. He foretells a danger which experience has realized in every age—that truth may fade away from the mind and become a mere powerless abstraction, and that spiritual realizations may gradually weaken until they are entirely effaced from the life. Surrounded in the Land of Promise by new interests which tempted them to new absorptions, it was all too easy for backsliding to set in. Every privilege has its underside of peril, the force of which, however, is always self-determined.

How is it possible for a man to keep his soul diligently, and amid the encroachments of the secular to remain loyal to his first professions? It is above all things necessary that he submit himself to constant and sincere self-examination as to the present extent of Christ's dominion in his life. When this creates a consciousness of failure, as it surely does, then he must penitently retrace his steps to the place alike of his vows and failures, and renew there the covenant to which he has been untrue. And he must engage in sacred ministry to others. Self must be dethroned. For the soul is enriched by sharing its treasures. Its life is protected as fellowship with the need of others is maintained up to the last limit of opportunity and capacity.

DEUTERONOMY V. 15.

**Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt.**

THE deepening of their original sense of utter dependence upon God would seem to be the earnest desire of Moses ere he leaves the people whom he has so long led. This word, which reveals alike their lostness and the greatness of the love and power of God which gathered them out of Egypt and made them into a nation is almost like a refrain in its reiteration throughout his survey and counsel. For the strong temptation to forget their beginnings under the absorbing interests of the new land is certain to assail and affect them. Their growing interest and national consciousness may only too surely dim their early impression of God's greatness and of their utter helplessness apart from Him. Prosperity is apt to make both men and nations proud. When our desires are achieved and our goal attained it is easy to become headstrong and to forget our beginnings.

In the life of the one who seeks to bear well in mind the grace by which he was redeemed, praise and gratitude will be spontaneous and sincere. It is always a healthy exercise for the soul to look to the hole of the pit from whence it has been taken. For it kindles the holy fire of responsive love more surely than anything else can do. There are many interests and duties in the new life which quite rightly engage our powers. Amid them all, however, we must take care that the memory of our first experience of Christ's salvation is kept bright. For nothing makes up for the loss of the first love which is born at the Cross. When that declines, life's power of witness is gone.

**He brought us out from thence that He might bring us in.**

THOUGH for forty years God's original intention with regard to His people had been thwarted by their disobedience and self-will, it remained unchanged. When He brought them out from Egypt under the shelter of the shed and sprinkled blood, it was with the covenanted assurance that they should be brought into the Land of Promise. This had been the secret inspiration of Moses' faith in all the wilderness days. He knew that all their inconvenience and discipline was but the necessary preparation for future conquest and settlement, for God's oath cannot be broken. Sin may delay but it cannot destroy the purpose of His love.

Herein is a true illustration of God's ways in every age. The message of His Gospel always calls men out of the bondage of sin into immediate enrichment and ultimate establishment. That some like Israel fail to realize the greatness of His salvation merely reflects upon their own moral attitude. But even so His love does not let His people go. And He Whose power "brought us out" must "bring us in" also to the full enjoyment of the things which He has promised, or they can never be realized. Nor does any single experience fully express Him. For He is ever seeking to bring His people out that He might bring them in—out of easy self-content into the place of devoted service, out of mere interest in the Truth into enthusiasm for its proclamation, out of mere passionless belief into burning zeal for its interests. This is the interpretation of every disturbance and unrest in the Christian life.

DEUTERONOMY vii. 22.

**The Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little . . . lest.**

GOD knew the character of His people too well and cared for them too much to give them immediate and complete victory over the nations of Canaan. Had they been spared the discipline and labour involved in dispossessing them, it would only have been to fall a victim to other and greater perils. When victory is too easily achieved either by a man or a nation it is apt to engender headstrong pride. Had Israel fallen into this snare it would have been a far more serious calamity than had they been defeated at the hands of their enemies. Thus it was that their possession of the land and the subjugation of its peoples was gradual. God's leadership of His children is always directed, not merely toward the acquisition of secondary benefits, but toward their moral and spiritual development.

Like Israel, we are sometimes inclined to chafe at the slowness of God's methods. We have expected immediate self-conquest, or speedy deliverance from opposition, or rapid results of toil. But our impulses have been contradicted and our expectations denied. For God loves us too well to deal with us according to our own desiring. He often keeps us waiting for the fulfilment of His promises, that we may be the better fitted to appreciate His gifts. Our progress is slow, and every inch of ground must needs be guarded when it is won. But only that we may not lose the humble and contrite spirit which is in His sight of great price. This is the interpretation of God's perplexingly indirect methods with us.

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee.

MEMORY is a great moral asset to the people of God, for it is the force by which the experiences of the past are utilized for present advancement or hindrance. It is of all capacities the strangest and strongest which men possess, for it is sovereign over time, space, and occasion. And it is part of the effectiveness of God's control of His people that this power should be captured and consecrated to their spiritual and eternal good. This command to Israel to "remember all the way" by which God had led them, was a contradiction of the human tendency to arbitrary selection of the exclusively bright or the exclusively dark things which have been experienced. For it is always a mistake to dwell upon some outstanding episode and to impart to it an importance out of all proportion to its value. To isolate any experience is to distort its meaning and lose its true value. If Israel is to have a true and worthy conception of God, the people must "remember *all* the way," its small details and large issues alike.

The main purposes of life are moral. This is the explanation of much that is otherwise inexplicable in God's guidance. The circumstances into which He brings His people are those which are calculated most readily to humble us with a sense of shortcoming, and to exalt us also by a consciousness of His grace. We fail in the greatest lesson of life if we do not constantly bear in mind what the past has taught us on this wise. And failing we frustrate Divine purposes which extend far beyond the measures of our own minds.



**But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.**

CONSPICUOUS in the history of the forty years' wandering is its testimony to God's faithfulness in answering the prayers of His people. Again and again, despite their ingratitude and unfaithfulness, He hearkened to their cry, and interposed His mercy and grace upon the course of their folly and sin. Indeed the whole story is studded with records of His faithfulness as with precious gems. It is one long account of Divine intervention in response to human supplication. Though the people themselves did not always realize this, Moses had no doubt as to the part which prayer had played throughout all the years. For he had lived in the secret place of the Most High, and had continually sought the face of God on their behalf as well as on his own. To him at least, the outstanding fact of their pilgrimage was the goodness of the Lord.

It is only the man of prayer who realizes how transcendent is the grace which answers prayer, even when past blessings have not been acknowledged, nor past obligations fulfilled. The wonder of the Divine patience never ceases to awe the one who experiences it. None but God Himself could give liberally to those who ask of Him without upbraiding them with their ungrateful unworthiness. That He does so, however, is a large part of the glory of the Gospel. How every successive answer to prayer should therefore evoke new devotion and faithfulness on our part! How carefully should we acknowledge each new gift by fuller dedication of ourselves to His service! How full of praise should be our lives, when, looking back over some dark circumstance of sin, we can yet see the shining as of a great light, and are able to say, "He hearkened unto me at that time also"!

**Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

THE Divine love which Israel experienced was to be the pattern of their treatment of others. Freely they had received and freely they must give. God had wonderfully enriched and blessed them when they had no claim upon Him, except that which His own nature and promises set up. Pity for their plight had brought sure aid in their hour of sorrow ; and the great outstanding fact of their national life was the unspeakable mercy of God. Such an experience might well make them merciful and generous in regard to those who should be strangers in their land, as they had been strangers in Egypt. Unless God's people manifest something of His likeness in their conduct towards others, they receive His gifts in vain.

Nothing is clearer in God's Word and as a fact of life than that "no man liveth unto himself." Every privilege carries its obligation, and every situation its opportunity. If we have been forgiven, then we must also be 'tender-hearted,' forgiving one another even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us. If we believe that God loved us, so "we ought also to love one another." If our burden has been borne by Divine grace, we must "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Constant remembrance of the love which sought us when we were wandering strangers from the Covenant of Promise, is an unfailing inspiration to conduct worthy of His Name.

DEUTERONOMY xi. 21.

**Days of Heaven upon the earth.**

THIS is a comprehensive description of the blessing of those who held God's Word in reverence, and who set themselves diligently to obey its precepts. The delights of freedom from all control are but illusory. True joy is only to be experienced under beneficent rule. Liberty without boundary is destructive of all true good. Those, however, who yield life to the government of God find happiness without regret, peace without remorse, and assurance without doubt. Their days are as the "days of Heaven upon the earth." And Heaven is that state in which God's control is ideally realized. Its every blessedness follows upon the setting up of the Throne.

Such a promise as this only finds its true fulfilment in Christ. It is He Who has opened Heaven to me, not merely as a future hope, but as a present enjoyment also. He has brought its life within the possible reach of all. For the "days of Heaven" are days of peace; and He brings peace to troubled conscience and restless heart. The "days of Heaven" are days of joy; and He imparts "joy unspeakable and full of glory" to lives saddened and darkened by earth's cares. The "days of Heaven" are days of victory; and He organizes victory in every disordered life, and makes the weakest of His people "more than conquerors." The "days of Heaven" are days of reverent adoration and worship; and He brings men into the holiest of all, where they bow in rapture and obedience before a reconciled God. But ere such experience can be ours, the Lamb must be upon the throne of our inmost heart.

**Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.**

THE people of God were left in no doubt as to His Will regarding the practical ordering of their lives. With scrupulous care and intimate detail His commandment made known His Will to them. None had the excuse of ignorance to offer in palliation of any transgression ; for the course of life was laid down for each one with entire completeness and clearness by the Lord Himself. Nothing was left to individual choice or option. The Word of God was final. Hence this prohibition against tampering with it, by adding to or taking from its enactments in order to accommodate human prejudice or weakness. Even in its smallest charges it was the Word of God, and was hence sacred.

Do we not need to lay to heart the force of this same injunction to-day ? Is there no danger of falling into the condemnation which was attached to any violation of the sacred Word on Israel's part. Are we not prone to diminish the Divine revelation by excluding from our practical consideration and application injunctions which are inconvenient and seemingly harsh ? And do we not sometimes yield ourselves to other considerations than those of the Divine pleasure ? Are we never guilty of adding to the Word the sanctions and prohibitions of a mere convention which is merely the expression of the world's mind, always hostile to God ? And yet we are only safe when His Word unchanged and unchallenged is the supreme authority of our lives. It is part of the deepest faith of the Christian life that He has fully and finally disclosed His mind, and that it is binding upon us.

DEUTERONOMY xiii. 8.

**Thou shalt not consent unto him . . . neither shalt thou spare.**

A MERELY negative attitude toward those who might entice their fellows from the service of God to the worship of the idols of the land was not sufficient. There must be active opposition to everything which in any way tended to draw men away from the God of Israel. However close was the kinship between the tempters, and those whom they sought to seduce, no quarter was to be given, no allowance made, and on no pretext were they suffered to escape. Passive rejection of their overtures was regarded as entirely inadequate on the part of the people of God. Their energies must be exerted toward the destruction of every unholy influence, even though this meant the breaking of closest ties of association. The moral and spiritual welfare of His people is the first concern of God's commandment. It must be the first concern on their part also.

The maintenance of passive refusal is in no sense to be regarded as victory in respect of any moral temptation. No man can be regarded as overcoming who does not both resolutely resist and courageously fight against the agent of his temptation. Merely to decline to enter into suggestions of departure from God, and yet to manifest no passionate hostility toward the evil itself, is but poor evidence of devotion to His cause. The man who is himself reconciled to God must ever be an antagonist to the tempter and all agents. Christ makes men "more than conquerors" by first making them good soldiers.

**We are the children of the Lord your God.**

THE fact of their sonship was fundamental. All the precepts and prohibitions of the ceremonial and moral law were based upon this relationship of peculiar privilege. It was because they were His children that they must needs be separated in spirit and in act from all the other nations. They must live under the sway of higher authority. Their very position and profession involved them in the responsibility of witnessing to His government by lives, which, in their outward expression, were entirely different from those of other men. Thus it is that with minute detail these ordinances regarding such things as food and possessions were given. Trivial as some of them may seem in themselves, obedience to them nevertheless demanded the courage of true faith. Their very contrast to the common ways of life was a testimony to the existence and nature of God.

It is because we are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ that there are many things we cannot and should not do. For our ideals are higher than those of the world, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We seek to do that which is pleasing in His sight; and it is part of our responsibility that every realm and sphere of interest should be brought under survey of His Word. Nothing in our lives is too small to be related by faith and obedience to the Will of God. And it is in doing this that we proclaim to a beholding world the fact of His Being and the power of His Gospel. What matters the reproach which is inseparable from the consecrated life if only we make our witness to Him effective?

DEUTERONOMY XV. 10.

**The Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works.**

THIS comprehensive promise is conditioned by the individual attitude of God's people toward others—the creditor toward the debtor, the master toward the servant, and all men toward each other. These relationships were to be governed by the consideration of God's mercy bestowed upon His favoured people. As He had dealt bountifully with them, so in all their dealings one with another they were to reflect His Spirit and to reproduce something of His character. The carrying out of these precepts might conceivably involve individuals in considerable inconvenience and even loss ; and it is as though God would have them realize that He is able to make up to them for all the cost of fidelity to His commandment. His compensating blessing was to rest upon them in whatever they put their hands unto. And His is the blessing which establishes men.

The Word of God is rich in its promises of blessing and reward to those who diligently live according to His ordinance. When they seek first the Kingdom of God all other things of material import are added unto them. Even the sufferings of this present time which all experience who seek to apply the principles of the Cross to their earthly relationships and interests, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is revealed in them. There is nothing narrow in the range of their legitimate interests. On "all thy works" the Divine blessing is given. But apart from His benison earth's brightest successes are merely decorated failures.



**In the place which the Lord thy God shall choose.**

THE ordinance of the Passover, so simple in its enactment and so full of deep meaning to a redeemed people, was hedged about by Divine restriction. It is as though God would not have so solemn an act degraded to the level of men's self-will. Hence the Feast must be observed only in the place of the Lord's own choice. How that choice was made known to the people we can only conjecture ; but that each one was made aware of the Divinely-appointed place for him is entirely certain. Thither he must journey as to a tryst, and there he met the Lord in significant worship which expressed his renewed dedication and loyalty. In this way was the religious life of the people sustained from year to year. Memory was pressed into the service of their highest interests by the God Who loved them.

There is one place in which the Lord has covenanted to manifest Himself to His people, to accept their devotion, and to bestow upon them gifts of His love—it is the place called Calvary. There, where all that the Passover anticipated of Divine sacrifice for the whole world was finished, His people must come into a contact with Him which renews their consciousness of His mercy and of their undying indebtedness. He cannot be found at men's own will and inclination, as many would fain imagine. No man comes unto the Father except by Christ Crucified and Risen. It is only in the place which the Lord has from eternity chosen that we can offer the acceptable sacrifice which is our reasonable service.

DEUTERONOMY xvii. 1.

**Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish.**

IT might almost seem as though this commandment were superfluous. For surely none would presume to approach the Lord with a gift which was in itself worthless, seeing that the gift was the outward expression of his inward faith and devotion. A diseased or blemished beast could only express a deficient and unworthy attitude toward God on the part of the offerer. The quality of the gift could, in the nature of the case, be nothing other than the measure of his personal regard for God. No man who loved Him could venture to dishonour His altar by offering that which was of little personal value to himself. While, therefore, this commandment was designed to prevent the people falling into this snare, it testified also to the purity and strength of their common impulse to approach and serve Him by sacrifice.

How fatal it is to imagine that because God is merciful He may be served by anything less than our best! It is not difficult to persuade ourselves that He Who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust, is likely to make generous allowances for the frailty of His people, and to accept just what they bring, overlooking its deficiency both in actual value and significance. This is why the consecration of many of His people is void of any true value. Their best is reserved for self-plans and pleasures. Their truest energies are expended upon material concerns. God has but a secondary place in their scheme of life. He gets nothing but the worthless and meaningless remainder of their service. And in degrading Him thus, they eternally damage themselves.

**Thou shalt be sincere with the Lord thy God.**

THE fact that every detail and contingency of life was provided for in the code of God's Law demanded an attitude of sincerity upon the part of His people. For it is always possible, when lines of conduct are laid down with unmistakable clearness, to obey in the letter while disobeying in the spirit. Outward conformity, however, is entirely without moral value unless it is the expression of inward loyalty of purpose. Hence this injunction of sincerity in regard to all the duty and obligation which rested upon the Israelites in respect of their relationship with the Most High.

The sternest words which fell from the lips of Christ were in denunciation of insincerity. In His day the Pharisees had elevated the outward observance of the Law into an elaborate system. With punctilious care its every detail was carried out as far as outward acts were concerned. Religion to them consisted of outward washings and ostentatious praying. But it was like the garniture of a tomb, covering corruption and foulness. The true spirit of devotion to God was entirely absent ; and thus it was that Christ uttered the strongest condemnation and warning concerning all such. For God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and sincerity. The will of God must be done from the heart. No substitution of any activity or profession for passionate and sincere loyalty to Him can be acceptable. And insincerity is a recoiling force. It brings back upon any man the certain nemesis of deterioration. The insincere man unconsciously, but surely, loses all power of sincerity, and becomes self-imprisoned.

**Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark.**

THE landmarks by which the possessions of the people were marked out—which possessions were originally apportioned by Divine ordinance—were regarded as sacred; for they testified to God's gifts; and to remove them therefore was an impiety. The man who did so, did despite to God's grace bestowed upon his neighbour. Throughout the Old Testament, therefore, a curse is attached to all such presumptuous action. All of which is illustrative of God's continued care of His people. He did not settle them in the land at any haphazard. Each family was the object of peculiar care, and the recipient of an individual favour in which He continued to maintain them. Hence the insertion of such a word as this in the directions given to His people for their common life.

The necessity laid upon God's people of maintaining respect and regard for the rights and possessions of one another, is enshrined and made permanent in the teaching of Christ. This Mosaic enactment regarding the removal of a neighbour's landmark, while of but passing and temporary importance to Israel in their occupancy of the land of promise, is expressive of a vital principle in the life of the Kingdom of God. Individual faith in Him has social obligations and consequences. Those who are members of Christ are also members one of another. To injure or endeavour to despoil a fellow-member of His Body is an utter contradiction of the Spirit of Christ. The Christian life has both a singular and a plural aspect.

**Let him go and return to his house.**

WHEN Israel was confronted with the necessity of resisting the aggression of foes or of engaging in an offensive warfare, only those were allowed to take any part whose hearts were entirely undivided. The importance and exigencies of the situation demanded the full consecration of every energy. If a man's thoughts were centred upon his new house, his new vineyard, or his newly-betrothed wife, he was unfitted for the struggle and accordingly disqualified. If courage failed him and he was fearful for his own life in the conflict, he was likewise incapacitated as a soldier. Israel's armies could only be recruited from the whole-hearted. For Israel's conflicts had more than a mere national significance. They were part of the outworking of the Divine purpose, and constituted something of His people's witness to God's reality before the world.

The perils of the divided heart are obvious. Those who would do God's service in the fight against evil to which all His people are committed, must themselves be delivered from every distracting influence. Everything in their lives must be subordinated to the main intent of fulfilling His will and carrying out His plans. This purpose must take precedence over every other concern, whether material or emotional. It is only the man who counts all things but loss that he may finish his course with joy, who can serve worthily in the conflict, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Such an one is inevitably endued from on high with courage which expels all fear, and zeal which transcends all considerations of personal convenience or expediency.

**He that is hanged is accursed of God.**

THIS interpolated interpretation acquires a meaning far wider than the limits of Israel's social order by the reference made to it in the New Testament. There it is definitely identified with the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The real inwardness of the method of His death is seen by its light. For not only was His crucifixion the expression of man's hostility, but the outward token also of the Divine curse. In nothing does the love of God appear so profoundly and powerfully as in thus giving Christ, not only to be made flesh for our sakes, but to descend to the lowest depths of suffering and shame as our Representative. Bearing as our Substitute the sins both of our nature and our wilfulness, He was exempted from no single degree of the Divine wrath upon sin. Herein is seen the grace of God *in excelsis*. Its highest height is scaled only when this its lowest depth is fathomed.

Herein is the inspiration of all true love to God. The Beloved was accursed that we might be accepted in Him. He bore the curse that we might wear the crown. Hence the one who realizes all that he owes cannot fail to love Him in return. It is such love as this, never original on our part but always responsive, which compels men to self-sacrificing devotion in the work of the Lord. It is a glowing fire, constantly fed by the fuel of new knowledge. And as we come to understand more of the unspeakable cost at which redemption was wrought, it becomes a flame which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown.

**Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds.**

CEREMONIAL defilement of the land was carefully guarded against by this injunction. Anything in the nature of an admixture of seed could only produce a hybrid crop. It was as though the native properties of the soil and the beneficent powers of nature were alike degraded by being diverted in this way from any one definite purpose. Behind every Divine prohibition of this kind is always some great natural law. Here it is the law which governs the productive power of the earth. This was no arbitrary command without meaning, but was aimed at the highest well-being, alike of the land and its possessors.

There is a striking moral and spiritual significance in this word, which is best understood by reading it in the light of the Apostolic injunction—"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The law of harvest is one of the laws of our being. Each of us is day by day sowing the field of his life with good or bad seed. Each seed is instinct with potentiality; and its harvest though immeasurably greater in extent, is always of its own quality. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." And no man can successfully live a double life, sowing partly to the flesh and partly to the Spirit. Christ plainly teaches that a man must be one thing or another in respect of the quality and issue of his life's actions. None can overstep the protective boundary of this injunction without incurring ultimate disaster.



DEUTERONOMY xxiii. 9.

**When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing.**

CIRCUMSTANCES add emphasis to ordinary duties. At any time it was incumbent upon God's people to separate themselves from all moral evil. Every Divine command relating to their daily lives attested this. Sacrifice and ordinance, precept and exhortation, all united to impress upon them the ultimate moral meaning of life. Its ordinary days were to be sanctified by obedience to the law of God. At all times they were to live as a holy people bearing His name and devoted unto His will. But when occasions of national need arose, and the men of war had to go out to battle against their foes, the duty of holiness became still more incumbent upon those who remained at home. It would seem that those who were at such time protected by the interposition of other lives between them and the fury of the enemy, were involved in a special responsibility. They must live worthily of the sacrifices which were being made for them. And each must help to form the national attitude toward God, which in every age conditions the co-operation of His power unto victory.

These words have their own application and message for us to-day. Those who are prevented from fighting the battles of the nation's cause and God's, have a responsibility which ordinary days do not bring. It is ours to cleanse from our lives all that is evil ; and by the attitude of reverence and prayer to help toward the formation of a national consciousness of God, apart from which the efforts of those who fight can come to nothing.

**The Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore  
I command thee to do this thing.**

THE obligation of obedience rested upon the unique relationship with God into which Israel had been brought. He had delivered them from Egypt, and had welded them into a nation for His own glory. The blessings of His providence had established and enriched them; and, in consequence, their responsibility was to obey His word, not as those who are under the power of an autocrat, but as those who owe allegiance to a God of love. Hence every declaration of His Will, dealing with the small as well as the great things of their lives, had an unique significance to them. Nothing could be negligible, since it came of Him to Whom they owed unspeakable indebtedness. His slightest wish became binding upon them, because they were dependent upon Him for life itself.

The whole scale of God's commandment to His redeemed people is similarly based upon their entire dependence upon Him. Redemption involves and inspires obedience. While the salvation which is in Christ Jesus is "without money and without price," each one who partakes of its saving benefit must voice his gratitude by consecration of his entire life. "If a man love Me he will keep My commandments," expresses the Saviour's expectation of His own. Indeed, until the law of God is set to the music of the love of God, it cannot be other than irksome. But then duty becomes delight, and His yoke becomes easy indeed. His statutes become the songs of His people, when they realize the fathomless grace of their redemption.

DEUTERONOMY xxv. 16.

**All that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.**

THIS is an anticipation of the positive statement of the New Covenant that "every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." The specific instances of specious wrong-doing which are here adduced, only serve to illustrate this principle. The worship of God is never to be divorced from practical morality. It has nothing in common with the allowance of profitable evil in the lives of His people. They, more than any others, must be scrupulous in regard to matters of righteousness. For they are His authentication and representatives. To vitiate their testimony by wilful indulgence in that which the world itself condemns, is an abomination to Him. His hatred of their sin, is the measure of His love for His children.

In Christ's day righteousness had come to be regarded as a matter of outward worship and ceremonial observance. Its true meaning had become obscured by those who elevated the eternal and accidental to the denial of the spiritual and vital. Against all such degraded conception of righteousness Christ warned His followers, when He bade them "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," and when He declared that, "except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." In Himself He showed the true pattern of a righteous life, and bade His people follow His steps. Here alone is the saving antithesis of that which is an abomination unto the Lord. For in Christ God is eternally well-pleased.

Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God . . . The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people.

THE covenant between God and His people is in the nature of a contract. It is a responsive and reciprocal agreement. Their solemn declaration that none other than He shall reign over them is met by His declared acceptance of them. Henceforth there is set up a mutual relationship which is superior to all time and circumstance—they are His, and He is theirs. Upon them rests the responsibility of being true to this Heavenward alliance. Its obligations are not a matter of conjecture but of direct revelation. Its gifts are enduements for the carrying out of responsible duty. Its control is of their entire being. The initial act of their surrender to God is to become a process of daily submission to His revealed purpose for them. And herein they find their true life.

God Himself undertakes peculiar responsibility in regard to those who are His consecrated people. It is as though their loyalty to Him liberates protective and sanctifying forces which become the dynamic of their lives. As they make Him King, He makes them conquerors. As they look after His interests, He preserves their well-being. That which they have committed to Him, He unsleepingly keeps against the Great Day. How secure are they who are thus avouched to be His peculiar people! Nothing in life or death can separate them from His love, and nothing can by any means harm them. But there must be no mistake as to the actual definiteness of this initial transaction.

**And all the people shall say, Amen.**

THE assent of the people to the curses which should rest upon the disobedient was a matter both of constraint and conviction. They were under the hand of God, and hence could not combat His fiat. But so reasonable also were the declared prohibitions, that the punishment for their infringement commended itself to every man's conscience. All God's ways are reasonable. The enlightened conscience recognizes in them the expression of perfect justice, even though they search the depth of every man's being. There is a Divinely-implanted instinct in His people which recognizes the deadly character of sin, even though they are unable to avoid it. When a man is sincere in regard to moral causes, he utters his "Amen" to the righteousness of the Divine sentence upon wrong-doing with his entire heart.

It is significant that not only does God's Word proclaim great principles of life, but gives also clear direction regarding their application. Specific details of conduct are definitely dealt with, as here. Not that any list of them exhausts the possibility of human failure, but because each of them illustrates the many-sided nature of temptation, and thus acts as a strong warning to all. There are potentialities of unspeakable evil in every man's nature, and only he is safe whose constant prayer is "Hold Thou me up." The Law itself, while it inspires fear, does not create holiness, and we must therefore always read it in the light of the grace of God which hath brought salvation to all men.

**All these blessings shall come upon thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.**

THE scale on which God's blessing is promised to His people is as wide as the furthestmost boundary of their lives. Every range of interest and activity is included in its beneficence. The reiteration of promise would almost seem to show that language itself is exhausted in endeavouring to express the magnitude and scope of God's faithfulness. By its experience His people were to be enriched, established, and enlarged. Individual, social, and national life was alike to be fertilized by the river of God. In a real sense this promise goes far beyond all that they could ask or think. But everything was dependent upon their own obedience. So long as their lives harmonized with the Divine will, nothing of the Divine riches could ever fail them. But discord meant impoverishment. God's people are never straitened in Him. The flow of His grace is only checked by ungracious disobedience.

How great is the power of the human will, can be estimated, in measure, by the fact that it can effectively thwart God's purposes. While it is abundantly clear in His Word that He desires nothing so much as the blessing of His people, it is equally clear that they on their part may frustrate His grace and bring to naught His plans. It is this fact which gives such sinister meaning to individual disobedience. It can never be a trifling thing that a man should interfere with what God has purposed from eternity. The deterioration of his own life by disobedience is bad enough, but that is by no means the end of the matter.

**The secret things belong unto the Lord our God.**

THE majesty and mystery of life are as twin forces, the resultant of which is an abiding inspiration to faith. They are the elements which combine to form that spirit of obedience which conditions the bestowal of every Divine blessing. And the things which are hidden, and those which are revealed, are in reality all one. For all are of God. There can be nothing in that which we do not yet know to conflict with that which has been declared. What is denied to curiosity is disclosed to faith. While always conscious that their knowledge is limited, God's people have always had light enough to walk by. And one day every secret thing will be made clear to them, and they shall know even as they are known.

If there were no mystery in life, faith would have no function. It is the magnitude and reality of the secret things which call its energies into action. Indeed the life of faith is just that life which enters into relationship with those secret things which belong to the Lord our God. How fully was this seen in Christ's own life ! He knew what was the present will of the Father, and the purport of His own mission. He was vividly aware of the pressure of the burden He had undertaken, and of the presence also of the Father's help. Yet there were things which even He did not know. There were times and seasons which the Father kept in His own knowledge. And there was the unanswered " why ? " of His own darkness. And yet He lived and wrought in the confidence that the secret things and the things revealed were all parts of one grand design. Hence His peace, His certainty, and His joy. And His disciples follow Him along the same way.



**Therefore choose life.**

THIS is the sum of the whole matter. The alternative pathways have been disclosed and the opposing forces of life have been declared. Now in one pregnant sentence Moses challenges the people with the final issue. Enlightenment has brought to them the inevitable responsibility of choice. Upon themselves now rests the burden of decision. The destiny of each is in his own keeping. For God will not coerce any into walking the pathway of His Will—which is the way of life. By every disclosure of Himself, in experience and injunction, He has sought to win them to willing allegiance, but has never dethroned their sovereign right of choice which is the crown of humanity. Now with unimpaired freedom each man must choose the direction of his life and its goal. Their earthly counsellor is about to be taken from them; and ere he goes this is the burden of His message.

The solemn power of choice is the strangest and strongest thing we possess. By its exercise we determine for ourselves light or darkness, blessing or cursing, life or death. A mistake here is of all errors the most serious and irreparable. Its consequences project themselves into eternity. Hence there is nothing about which we need to be so careful as in regard to this imperative duty of making life's governing choice. With all the warning and guidance that is available, there can be no recrimination of God, nor any revision of our declared allegiance when the consequences of our wrong choosing overtake us. Every man must abide by his choice. We each determine our own destiny.

**He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.**

IT is not difficult to imagine the shrinking and timidity with which Joshua approached his life-work. There had been something remote about the splendid leadership of Moses, which, while it could not fail to evoke admiration and loyalty, could not fail also to inspire the one who was to succeed him with a sense of his own insufficiency. In handing over the care of the nation to the younger man, Moses is generous in his encouragement and condemnation. He declares to him the secret of his own life—it has been the unseen presence of the Most High. In this confidence Joshua need not fear to cross the Jordan and face the conflicts of Canaan. The people may fail him, as they subsequently did, but his unfailing resource would be the faithfulness of God. He Who had been with Moses in all the ups and downs of the wilderness life, would prove all-sufficient for his successor in the new difficulties of the Promised Land.

How often when appalled by the greatness of some task, and made fearful by the removal of one upon whom we have hitherto leaned, have we proved that God has by no means exhausted Himself in His gifts to Moses! How often have we failed Him when entrusted with some high task of the Kingdom, only to find that He is unfailing! Even when in an evil hour of wilfulness or cowardice we have deserted the cause, it has been to prove that He does not forsake us. And it is the stirrings of His providence which ever and anon bring us back to take up again in a humbled and chastened spirit the privilege we have deservedly forfeited.

He found him . . . He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him.

COULD anything more completely record God's grace to Israel? It stretches back as far as Egypt, and reaches forward beyond the horizon. The miraculous preservation of the pilgrim host, the welding together of the raw elements into a nation, the discipline by which moral things became as real to them as things material, and the supply of their every need, has but one interpretation. God Himself has been at work from the beginning. Their entire history is the unfolding of His purposes towards them. The nation is His authentication. Their survival is proof of His power. Every possession of theirs is stamped with His image and superscription.

How true an account do these words give, not only of Israel's experiences, but of the life of every believer in every age! For they are a sort of foreglow of the Evangel of Christ. In Him they reach their truest meaning. For He came to find the lost, to lead the wayward, to teach the ignorant, and to guide the feeble unto life eternal. And He still carries on His saving work. Into the wilderness, whence they have wandered, He follows lost men, nor rests in the search until they are safely borne home on His shoulders rejoicing. How tenderly He leads them in the subsequent days, going before them whenever He puts them forth, and saving them from all fear! How patient is He with them in the schoolroom, as they misread His lessons and often misunderstand His meanings! And how vigilant and certain is His safe-keeping of those who learn to entrust themselves to His care!

**As thy days, so shall thy strength be.**

IN this promise there is an entire contradiction of the natural order. As a man's days increase, especially when they draw near to the end, his strength diminishes until it becomes mere labour and sorrow. In the Divine life, however, there is no such diminution. Each day brings increased strength with increased responsibility. And it is in the plenitude of his power that the true believer at last goes in to see the Lord.

It takes some of us a long time to learn the limitations of self-help. We are apt to set out full of hope and buoyancy, with a slightly contemptuous opinion of the foe, and with little disposition to learn anything from the failures of others. With jaunty certainty of superiority and success we confidently go forward—and fail. And this we do again and again, until the fact of our strengthlessness penetrates through the resisting self-conceit, and we at length acknowledge our utter insufficiency. Then it is that such a promise as this acquires a new meaning for us. For it is only in the man of conquered spirit and confessed weakness that the Divine strength can be perfected. To him, however, who tremblingly and with no self-confidence sets out upon the pathway of discipleship, there is assured correspondence between precept and power. A sufficient enduement is attached to every ordered engagement. There is a vital connection between duty and dynamic. To the obedient believer support is proportioned to strain. And his life is broken up into easily handled portions—a day at a time.

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

HOW great is the destructive influence of one sin upon the purpose of God, and upon the destiny also of the man who commits it. God's original promise to Moses was that he should lead Israel into the land of Canaan. Now, because of one sin, he dies at its very gates. While God's grace shines brightly through the record of Moses' death, His righteousness in regard to his disobedience and wilfulness is yet vindicated. For the sin of Moses was all the greater because of his position and privilege. The man who has seen God face to face is involved in no ordinary responsibility.

The death of Moses, "according to the Word of the Lord," sheds an interpreting light upon an experience by no means uncommon. How many there are whose hopes are disappointed, whose ideals are never fully realized, and by whom success is just missed. And how many are in consequence perplexed, baffled, and dispirited because of the conscious incompleteness of their lives! To all such the fact of Moses' death is full of meaning. For he died in the assurance that it was God Who had caused him to see the land. Hence the vision could not be the end of everything. The very fact that he saw at least something of Canaan is prophetic of ultimate possession. He died in the confidence that God's honour was inextricably bound up with his life and death. Even sin cannot finally thwart His purposes for His people.

**Then thou shalt have good success.**

CONFRONTED with the immense responsibility devolving upon the one who must lead the people into the Land of Promise, the conditions of victory are clearly laid down to Joshua by Divine revelation. The Book of the Law was to be his constant meditation. He was to observe all that was written therein, in order that he might do it. By obedience his life was to be brought into harmony with the Divine Will, and his service with the Divine plan. Then entire prosperity was assured. For the purpose of God is indissolubly linked with the power of God. His design is dynamic.

These words of conditioned promise may well serve as a comprehensive guide for individual Christian life. The man who lives according to the Word of the Lord, who studies its precepts and promises, who meditates upon its ideals and enduements, and who sincerely seeks to respond to its every challenge, cannot fail to realize good success. On the other hand, neglect of the Word of God is the secret of all failure. Men may know its text, but if their knowledge is not translated into actual obedience it is as when light becomes darkness. Only by observing to do all that is written therein, as it is increasingly apprehended and understood, can the power of God's Spirit be known in any life. Especially is this true in regard to spiritual service. Prosperity in the winning of other lives to the Saviour is never achieved apart from living faith in the written Word. Herein is the secret of all good. For God honours His Word above all things.

**She bound the scarlet line in the window.**

THE story of Rahab and her salvation in the day of Jericho's downfall is one of the most vivid pictures of the bestowal of God's grace which the Old Testament affords. Faith came to her by hearing of the great things which God had done on the other side of the river ; and she realized that her one hope of safety lay in making friends with His conquering army. Thus she embraced the first opportunity of doing so which the visit of the spies afforded. She trusted their word as the oath of God ; and accepted, as a true token of the faithfulness in which it should be fulfilled, the agreed sign of the scarlet cord. Nor was she put to confusion. When Jericho was taken she alone and those who were with her were saved from destruction. Subsequently she was adopted into the family of God's people, and ultimately became an earthly ancestress of the Messiah ! Such is the greatness and fulness of covenanted salvation, reaching further than she could ever have dreamed.

The sign of the scarlet line bound in Rahab's window as a true token and assurance, is prophetic of that sign by which all true faith in God is expressed. It is the Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, which alone brings certainty of deliverance. It is only when faith displays that evidence, that salvation is secured and realized. No other shelter avails in the Day of Wrath—or now. And it is in virtue of the precious Blood also that we are adopted into God's family, and become living links in that chain of service, which ultimately ends with the coming of Christ into other human hearts. How complete is the salvation of God ! And how simple the terms on which it becomes ours !



**We have not passed this way heretofore.**

JOSHUA had no precedent to guide him in the conduct of the campaign to which he was committed. No previous national experience was at all analogous to the difficulties which now confronted Israel. Hitherto, in their nomadic life, they had of course frequently realized God's intervention, saving them in difficulty and danger. Now, however, entirely new circumstances confronted them, new difficulties challenged them, and new dangers made them understand afresh their need of Divine leadership. The very fact of their own insufficiency became a factor of victory, as it induced them to look to God alone, and implicitly to obey His direction.

There is positive blessing at all times in the realization that every stage of the journey differs essentially from all former experience. Nothing is more perilous than a state of fancied security which induces carelessness in the seeking of direct guidance and grace from God. It is virtual unbelief which presumes to take one step without His aid. Herein indeed is the secret of ultimate disaster. When any of us imagines that he can dispense with prayer and the seeking of God's mind, he is courting defeat. For there are ahead of us pitfalls of evil beyond measure, which we can never avoid by the light of our own wisdom. And there are possibilities of good also which we can never realize if we have not the clear shining of the Heavenly light upon the earthly pathway. Each day is full of mystery to us. But it is full of purpose to Him.

**What mean ye by these stones?**

THE heap of stones gathered out of the river bed and set up at Gilgal by a representative of each tribe, was to be the enduring memory of God's goodness to His people. It could not but fail to excite the curiosity of their children in the days to come. Indeed it was designed to this end, that they might learn what God had been to the nation. For so also they would learn something of their own consequent responsibility towards Him. God's grace by no means ends with the event of its expression. Its influence upon men and nations alike is for all time. History is His story; and it is well that every age should learn from its predecessor of what its inheritance really consists. In this case the monument has now crumbled away. But Israel in its scattered state still observes the Passover, and is in every land under heaven a living witness to the power of God.

It is always fatally easy to forget God's benefits. The first rush of gratitude for deliverance, for answered prayer, and for enriching blessing, is apt to be soon over. It is, hence, of value to stimulate memory in every way possible. This is the inwardness of that greatest of all Memorials which the Lord Himself ordained. As the pillar of stones declared God's favour of old, so does the Feast of Bread and Wine declare in all ages His supreme love in the world's redemption, until Christ comes again. It is part of the Church's witness to the unbelieving world. Its persistence in all the years since the great Event bears testimony to the truth of the Gospel of God, which is irrefutable.

## JOSHUA v. 14.

**As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.**

THE appearance of God to Joshua when the conflict to which he was pledged was imminent, was his crisis hour. Henceforth he knew himself to be under the Lord's direction. The true leadership of Israel's host was invisible. He must sustain a twofold relationship, to the unseen Lord, and to the people who looked to him for guidance. That the One who appeared to him was the Son of God Himself is a matter of no doubt. Hence this appearance is prophetic of His yet greater coming, and of His perpetual presence with those who seek to do His bidding. Joshua need have no apprehension as to the outcome of the long campaign before him. The drawn sword he has seen is the sword of God Himself. By its unsheathing, victory is entirely ensured.

We are not here to help God. He can well gain the victory apart from our service, though in His grace he deigns to use His redeemed people for the fulfilment of His purpose toward the world. Our rightful attitude is that of submission to His leadership. The one who seeks to receive His orders from the Great Captain, and from none other, is everywhere, and always, certain of success. For nothing can withstand His power exerted through obedient weakness. It is of all folly the greatest for any man to presume to go forth in Christ's service without this qualifying vision and direct commission of the Lord Himself. All may have it; for He never fails to respond in power to faithful obedience and obedient faith.

**And they took the city.**

NO more miraculous story is on record than that of the capture of Jericho. It fell to the people of Israel in such a manner as that no one but the Lord Himself could receive any of the glory. The plan whereby the city was compassed by a silent host for seven days seemed to be utterly foolish and meaningless. The expectation that its walls should fall at a blast of trumpets and a great shout on the seventh day, seemed altogether preposterous. Such, however, was the wisdom of God, which at all times seems to the natural man to be utter foolishness. The weapons of the warfare of those who battle under His captaincy are, however, never carnal and such as men might devise. But they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

That the fall of Jericho is prophecy as well as history, is very certain. It affords clear direction to the people of God for the successful carrying out of their welfare. Faith in the living God which compasses the opposition by prayer, and obedience which is content to seem a weak thing as men count strength, are the interlocked secrets of victory over every foe. There is no Jericho, which uplifts its head against the reign of God in the world, which can stand the march of prayer, the witness of obedience, and the shout of triumphant confidence in Him. His people take the city when they are weak enough to adopt the methods of His wisdom. Then the glory is so entirely His that the whole spoil of conquest is gladly laid at His feet as a devoted thing. The song of triumph declares that He hath done all things well.

**Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.**

THE sin of Achan, although hidden from every human eye, was not suffered to go undetected. On account of his disobedience, the whole army of God's people was halted, and humiliating defeat followed the magnificent victory of Jericho. The wrong-doing of one man brought confusion to the whole nation ; and God could not do other than deal with them as He did. Only so could He vindicate His own holiness, and emphasize the responsibility of obedience which rests upon those who profess to belong to Him. Such is the power of a single sin that its consequence extends far beyond the life of the wrong-doer. It implicates many who are entirely unconscious of its commission. For life is an organic whole, and by one man's transgression sin enters into a whole world. Nothing is more clearly written in the annals of history, and of present experience also, than the fact that sin is not finished with when a man has ceased its practice.

Secret sin is always a tragedy ; for it is a setting at naught of God's holy commandment. While its consequence may not immediately appear, it is always as certain as anything can be that sooner or later it must be disclosed. That hour of self-discovery calls for courage of the highest order. For the " accursed thing " must be pitilessly dealt with, and its influence brought to an utter end. This is the only way by which the Ai in any life can be turned from a place of defeat and disgrace into a place of glorious victory.

**Joshua drew not his hand back.**

IN striking contrast to Achan's disobedience is Joshua's whole-hearted carrying out of the Divine command. Having received instruction to spare nothing in the overthrow of the city, he resolutely set himself to fulfil God's requirements. The necessity of such wholesale destruction, and the sacrifice of so much lawful gain, might well have caused questioning in his mind. Having heard, however, the Lord's direct word, he neither hesitated nor debated as to its fitness ; but gave himself to its entire fulfilment. Herein lay the secret of his success. He trusted God and asked no questions, content to wait for an explanation which he could not then have understood.

How many there are who begin well, and intend to be entirely obedient to the Word of the Lord, but who, when His commandment conflicts with their own convenience or enrichment, draw back their hand from the task of obedience ! They go on with God only so long as it does not cost them much. They are His servants only " up to a point " ; and that point of departure is the danger-point in any life. From thence the course of defection becomes steeper and perilously easy ; until, ultimately, the life that is drawn away from full obedience is found to be energetic in direct disobedience, and even opposition. There is no sadder man than he whose heart has played coward before the demands of conscience. For the opportunity of self-revision does not ordinarily come to him. Let us therefore fear to be in any degree less courageous than was Joshua. For his is the pathway of the true life.

**Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live.**

EVEN the best men make fatal mistakes by over-impulsive action. The Gibeonites, whose deceptive conduct in endeavouring to make alliances with Israel was successful in blinding Joshua's vision, would never have succeeded had he sought counsel at the hand of the Lord. Over-encouraged, however, by previous successes, which had evidenced in such a marked way the presence and over-ruling care of the Lord, he became presumptuous, and was beguiled into making a far-reaching decision upon which the approval of God could not rest. Then, having pledged his word, and, in a sense, the honour of God also, he could not withdraw, even though the deception of the Gibeonites was discovered. Consequently their subsequent history is intertwined with that of the Israelites, much to the embarrassment and loss of the latter. How much sorrow in after years might have been avoided by the submission of this matter to the Divine judgment!

All this is written for our warning. We are day by day confronted with the necessity of making choices whose issues reach further than can now be seen. Nor can we always see the importance of the choice at the time. Destiny often comes to men disguised. Hence it is of the utmost importance that we fall not into Joshua's error, in determining what affects our own future and that of others, without first seeking and finding Divine guidance. Our pursuits, pleasures, friendships, alliances, must all be brought under the survey of God's wise purpose. Otherwise we shall find in them destructive elements whose influence cannot be overtaken. Nor does He keep the honest soul waiting long for the guidance upon which so much depends.



**Because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.**

HEREIN is the secret of all victory. The kings whose overthrow Joshua compassed were infinitely stronger than the forces of Israel. Had it come to a conflict between them and an unaided Israel, the outcome would not have been long in doubt. Against God, however, they could not stand. He fought for His people because they fought with Him. The evil of self-confidence having been discovered and renounced, their dependence upon God assured the victory whose completeness attested His power and glory.

God is always on the side of the man or nation whose heart is right toward Him. When His cause claims every energy, and considerations of His glory outweigh all other influences, He never fails to assert Himself as the God of righteousness. Israel, by no means, stands alone in this experience. Right down the ages it has always been the same. God has not always—nor even usually been on the side of the big battalions. And who can say that it is otherwise to-day? From the welter of war which has darkened and devastated the entire world in our own day, one thing is clear. Only that nation which, discarding all other confidence, seeks in its warfare to be worthy of the Divine co-operation, will ever receive it. In the end of the day it is not munitions which decides any conflict. It is the mercy and majesty of God expressed in the help of His people. The true strength of any nation lies in the organization of its life around His Will and under His government. And the same is true of any man.

JOSHUA xi. 9.

**Joshua did unto them as the Lord bade him.**

IT is a good thing to acknowledge that God has a plan for every detail of the service of His people, and to endeavour prayerfully to discover it, in order courageously to carry it out. The record of Joshua's life is rich in the intimations of God which he received. And it is noticeable that it is always in connection with service for Him that the Lord appeared to him. Indeed, it is difficult to interpret the visibly miraculous in his life apart from its hidden underside. While no distinct account is given of every appearance of the Lord to him, it is clear that he held frequent and constant converse with Him. In the secret place He learned how to carry out the plans which he there apprehended. The word of the Lord became dynamic to him, so that he came forth to the people clad with courage, to lead them against their foes, and to vindicate the wisdom and faithfulness of the Lord Whose representative he was.

Here alone is the strength of everything effective and victorious in Christian service. If we will but take time for the finding out of the Divine plan before embarking on any enterprise, however small or great it seems, we shall at the same time be "endued with power from on High." It is only when men presume to go out upon a warfare at their own charges that they fail. Human wisdom is no match for Satanic cunning. Any strength other than the strength of God Himself is inadequate in this conflict. But God may always be depended upon by the trustful and loyal believer, who hearkens to His voice and seeks no other counsel beyond His Word.

**All the kings thirty and one.**

THERE is a completeness in the victory which God organizes for His people which removes for ever any doubt as to His intervention on their behalf. With explicit care this account is given of the names of all those kings who were subdued by Israel under Joshua, and whose lands were henceforth possessed and occupied by them. Neither singly, nor in alliance, could they stand against the strength which was "made perfect in weakness." Nor did aught fail of the sacred oath by which God had pledged Himself to them at the beginning. Every foe was dispossessed, and the whole land was delivered into their hand. For God does nothing by halves. His work is perfect, as His covenant is faithful.

All the recorded history of God's people is parabolic and prophetic. It is anticipatory of that greatest of His comings to dwell among the children of men which was fulfilled in Christ. For in Him alone is every promise of victory and deliverance realized to the uttermost of its meaning. Every king who defies the law of God in human life is dethroned by His incoming to the yielded heart. The foe may contest His rule, but can never resist His power. Passion and pride, sloth and self-will, gloom and greed, are overcome when Christ is Lord indeed. We may become "more than conquerors through Him Who loved us"—on these terms. The victory may not be suddenly accomplished, and we may have to resist "unto blood, striving against sin." But there is no doubt as to the absoluteness of the issue.

**There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.**

THERE is an amplitude in the purposes and promises of God which any single life can never fully realize. Joshua had experienced an uninterrupted course of victory. No foe had been suffered to interfere with God's people under his leadership. As each one arose, it was only to be conquered. Yet now at the end of his life, when old and stricken in years, he is encouraged by the Divine assurance that there are yet greater and further-reaching victories to be won, and larger blessings to be experienced. His work is not yet finished. For though he may not fight again, he has to exercise a ministry of encouragement and inspiration to others, which will eventuate in their entire possession of the land concerning which God has sworn to them.

This exhortation to Joshua is in entire accord with the character of God's dealings at all times with His people. His grace is always larger than their conceptions. Beyond their best experience there is a better. The horizon recedes to the pilgrim of faith as he marches onwards. And at the end of his journey these words will yet be true, and will encourage him as he passes beyond the earthly scene of his service. For over on the other side "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." And it is all ours since "we are Christ's, and Christ is God's." The half has not yet been told of that which He has prepared for His people. How full of courage should we be therefore as we press on toward the mark for the prize of our high calling!

**Because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel.**

THE reward of Caleb's faithfulness was the possession of Hebron. He had not hesitated to stand courageously with the minority when the spies brought back their report of the Land of Promise, and their counsel of fear that its conquest was impossible. Caleb's trust in God had prevented his joining with them in proffering their cowardly advice. For although he too had seen the difficulties of the situation, he had also seen God as the Almighty One. Obstacles, therefore, could not daunt him ; and his report was an inspiration to courageous faith, which, had the people followed, would have been more than justified by God's co-operation. Now he reaps the harvest of his faithfulness. Hebron is assigned to him as an inheritance for ever.

The man who is single-minded must often be single-handed. He must stand alone for God when it is much easier to go with the multitude. This means that he must first gain the victory over himself, for it is only the conquered man who risks everything on the faithfulness of the Lord. His reward is always in the nature of a spiritual enlargement and inheritance. Life expands to the one whose faith is of this order. And though the possession of Hebron means further and sorer conflict, it brings untold blessing and enrichment to him. God is never unrighteous to forget those who wholly follow Him, and His gifts are always "exceeding abundant above all that we ask or think."

**Give me also springs of water.**

THE petition of Achsah, and Caleb's granting of it, while but a fragment of the history of those days, explaining how it came to pass that her descendants should be in possession of that land and its water-courses, is also illustrative of a great principle of life, in respect of men's relationship with God. For Caleb dealt with her request as God deals with those of His people. He gave her more abundantly than she had asked. And God's answers to our prayers are always larger than the suggestions we venture to make to Him. He edits our petitions in the spirit of generous love, and interprets our desires in their best meanings. For His apprehension of our need is infinitely greater than our own; and so He blesses His people according to His own foreknowledge and love.

We honour God when we ask great things of Him. It is of the essence of child-like trust that we make our petitions large. Yet even so they are always far smaller than His purpose of goodwill toward us. His gifts are always worthy of Himself. What an encouragement is this to the consciously needy soul! We may always trust the love of the Father to supply all our need "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." And from His grace there flow streams which irrigate and fertilize the whole area of life. It is therefore in the nature of a condemnation that our lives should be arid and barren, and that we should be in any degree satisfied to have it so. For if we have not it is surely because we ask not.

**The lot of the children of Joseph.**

IT was not open to any of the tribes to settle where they would. Definite assignment was made to each, and hence all possibility of strife was obviated. Each section of the people was settled in its territory according to Divine ordinance. And each settlement was clearly made with due regard to the strength of each unit ; for each location had its peculiar difficulties and inevitable conflicts. Thus was " the lot of the children of Joseph " ordered. With great nicety of demarcation its borders were outlined. Nothing was left to haphazard chance. While this certainly restricted their liberty, it also assured their protection, as Divine commandment ever does. This record of ordered settlement in the land is the basis of all their subsequent history. For it assumes faith on their part, and faithfulness upon God's. They are in a special sense His people, and He their God.

There is positive moral and spiritual value of the highest order in the realization that all our circumstances are the subject of God's care. To the believer life holds no such thing as chance or mishap. Each individual child is the object of a special Fatherly solicitude, and his every lot in life is the expression of perfect wisdom. How contented then should we be with such things as we have, since it is in our prescribed lot that the Lord Himself has covenanted to be with us, and never to leave nor forsake us ! Herein is the secret of perfect peace and assured victory. To leave the land of His appointment is, however, to cut ourselves off from all right to the appropriation of His promises. Thus, indeed, is many a life spoiled and rendered useless.



**The mountain shall be thine . . . and the outgoings of it shall be thine.**

THE difficult lot is the special mark of God's favour to His people. The mountainous country assigned to Ephraim and Manasseh was inhabited by a fierce and war-like people whom they must dispossess. The land itself was thickly wooded, and they must hew down the timber, and clear the ground before it could be brought under cultivation. They must make good their claim to possession by vigorous service and courageous conquest. Amid all the trials thus involved they were supported by this direct promise, that "the mountain shall be thine." Potentially it was theirs already under the oath of God. Actually it became theirs only step by step, as by His help they took it.

God's choicest gifts always involve their possessors in obligations, for the fulfilment of which they also qualify them. While His promises are received by faith, their actual experience is often a matter of long patience and toilsome obedience. The great Husbandman leaves much of the cultivation of life to our own energies, always working, of course, under His direction. The "Captain of our Salvation" leads us forth to battle, and it is our hands which must deal the blow, and our feet which must tread down the enemy. The abiding and sufficient inspiration both of the toil and the warfare is the certitude of His word, "the mountain shall be thine." The vision of the ultimate is a positive sustaining energy to souls often weary because of the toilsome way.

**How long are ye slack to go to possess the land ?**

JOSHUA'S challenge to the seven tribes which had not yet put in any claim to their inheritance is a condemnation of their unbelief. God had promised that the land should be divided unto them by lot, and already the whole land was subdued. Yet these did not take their share, although faith was then reinforced by sight. It was actually theirs, though they had no enjoyment whatever of its possession. It is for this reason that Joshua charges them thus, stimulating them to immediate action ; in consequence of which they were ultimately brought into the experience of the good things which God had given them according to His word.

How many there are among us who are in similar case with regard to God's promises ! Everything has been secured to faith by the victory of Calvary. The good of the Promised Land lies before every believer. All things that pertain to life and godliness have been given to us in Christ. Whence then the poverty and barrenness of many a Christian life ? Whence the lack of holiness in character, and victory in service ? Surely it is because faith does not claim its inheritance. Slackness in regard to trusting God, and in regard to taking the promised gifts by fulfilling their governing conditions, is the cause of all that is deplorable in His Church to-day. How long is it to continue ? For this is a state of things which must be remedied by our own individual action. Even God Himself cannot do some things for us. For He will not deny His own nature, nor harm His children by forcing blessing upon them.

**According to the word of the Lord.**

WHEN the whole land had been divided, and every tribe was settled, then Joshua himself received his inheritance at the hands of the children of Israel. They gave him the city of Timnath-serah in Mount Ephraim, and there he dwelt. It is striking that he who had led the people into the land, under whose leadership their victories had been gained, and at whose direction each tribe had been settled in its own land, should himself receive nothing more than the site of a single city. How disinterested does his action now appear ! When he might have had the greatest and best, he chose the least. It is as though in him the spirit of leadership had refined all selfishness. His supreme care was for the people committed to his charge. In securing their highest good he found his own deepest contentment.

This is ever the cost and characteristic of spiritual leadership. The one who is called to such responsibility must renounce all self-claim, and be willing to spend and be spent without hope of reward, or even of recognition. He must be willing that others should reap the benefits of his own consecration. The passionate purpose of his life must be, not the self-acquisition of any material prosperity, but the greatest enrichment of those whom he may lead into the Land of God's Promise. He is a true leader who loses his own life that others may find life. Such an one is immortal. He lives for ever as a doer of the will of God. His renunciation of earthly honour and treasure ensures the acquisition of unfailing glory. And in this he follows closely in the footsteps of the Lord Christ.

**Appoint out for you cities of refuge.**

IT is important to note that the first concern of the people, after their settlement in the land is completed, was for those who should be in any way distressed. It is as though their common privilege involved them in equally common responsibility toward others. As a nation they must act toward the weak, the oppressed, the endangered, as God in His mercy had dealt with them. Thus in the forefront of their social and religious ordinances is that of the "Cities of Refuge." To any one of these Cities the inadvertent man-slayer might flee, to find therein safety and security from the threatening of the avenger of blood. His life was henceforth the object of special care, nor could it be taken as forfeit for his deed so long as he abode within this shelter. How vividly is the work of Christ thus foretold in the long ages before His coming!

It is in this light that the names of the several Cities of Refuge are significant. Each of them represents some aspect of His redeeming fulness. For instance, Kedesh means holiness, Shechem means strength, Hebron means fellowship, Golan means joy, and Bezer a fortress. In Christ sinful men find not only refuge from the outraged law of God, but strength and joy, holiness and companionship. Indeed, there is nothing that men may ever need in time or eternity that is not found in Him, Who fulfils every type, and in Whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells. Why should so many Christians live as though their Lord were other than rich and generous?

There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken . . . all came to pass.

SUCH is the record of God's faithfulness to His covenant. Large expectations had, from the beginning, been aroused by His promises, but none of them were large enough. His grace went beyond the greatest desires of His people, for their best interpretation of His Covenant inevitably fell short of the purposes of His love. Now in retrospect they are able to see how completely His word has been fulfilled to them. Despite their instability and frequent backsliding, not one thing had failed. His love had endured all their faithless defection. His faithfulness had proved victorious over their fitfulness, and His power had brought everything to pass for their good. Israel's history is one long record of God's unchanging goodness, both in design and detail.

The honour of God is bound up with the fulfilment of His word to those who trust Him. The ultimate security of their faith is His own character. He cannot deny Himself. However great His promises seem, and however apparently impossible in their fulfilment, this is the certainty of those who hope in His Covenant. As with Israel, it may and often does take a long time for the realization in personal experience of the good things He has promised to them that fear Him. But in the fulness of time this word is always true of Him, and of His people. Even the incomplete retrospect of life which is possible now convinces us of this. When the whole journey is completed and the full measure of His grace is discerned, the song will break forth of itself—"He hath done all things well!"

**Take diligent heed . . . to cleave unto Him.**

TO his commendation of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, Joshua adds this note of warning. Their faithfulness to the duty committed to them had entirely merited the praise which he bestowed upon them. They had kept the commandment of the Lord in active service ; but now they were to be settled in a much more passive and quiet life. In such changed circumstances men are apt to relax their vigilance, and are prone to lower their ideals. This word warns them of that danger, and impresses upon them the fact that it is only by cleaving fast to the Lord that they can continue to fulfil the obligations of their faith in Him. And continuance is, after all, the final proof of reality.

No hour is so full of peril as that which finds men flushed with the success of a completed task. For there follows upon it the temptation to slackness. Those who have exerted themselves to the full in moral and spiritual activities which have eventuated successfully, not infrequently become unaccountably stale ; just as the string which has been stretched to its utmost tension gets out of tune. Reaction from their efforts is manifested by strange distaste for the things by which alone they truly live. Having done all, they fail to stand ; and their fall is the greater because of their former conquests. To " cleave unto the Lord " is the one and only safety of every thus tempted soul. He can keep us from failing of His grace after such fashion, if we for our part recognize the danger and cling the closer to Him.

**Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth.**

THE greatest test of all comes to men when they know themselves to be face to face with death. In presence of the last enemy and the imminent conflict, the hidden man of the heart is revealed. His secret faith is then attested in its reality, or its worthlessness. With all opportunity of amending his record for ever gone, conscience unerringly declares the true verdict upon the whole of life, and compels a man to commune with himself. So it was with Joshua. He was able to look back upon a past which had been full of the mercy of God. The outstanding characteristic of his life had been the unchanged goodness of God. That star had never for an hour been dimmed to his faith's vision. Each experience of difficulty and conflict had but brought Him nearer, and made His help a greater reality. Secure in the confidence that his own failures were covered by Divine mercy, his last words are full of commendation of the Lord. He gathers his experience into a fervent exhortation to the people to cleave unto the Lord in entire loyalty of heart as to their true Sovereign.

Happy is the man who is able to face the end of life with calmness! The great adventure which men call death has no terrors for him, since he knows that beyond the veil he can but meet the Lord, Whom "having not seen" he has long hitherto loved. Grace covers his shortcomings, and the oath of God supports him in the mysterious shadows which gather around the close of his earthly experiences. Neither "life, nor death, nor any other creature can separate" him from the love which has at all times sustained him. Even though he finds no words to utter, his whole life is an Evangel. He has lived "unto the Lord"—and so he dies. And his works follow him in their power of influence upon other lives.



**We will serve the Lord.**

THUS the people responded to Joshua's challenge. Inspired by his recital of the great things God had already done for them, and driven to the necessity of making choice, they unitedly declared themselves the Lord's people. With every sincerity of soul they determined to do Him service; and their vow was accepted as an honest intention. For God always regards the purposes of His people at its best. How sadly they failed, is written large in their subsequent history. Yet even so their failure is but a dark background against which God's persistent grace shines. For even so He did not fail them, nor break His Covenant.

Every experience of God's loving-kindness imposes the inevitable necessity of choice. For all His gifts are designed to draw us into the fullest fellowship with Him. No man rightly conceives either his own history, or the majesty of the Gospel, whose response is not on this wise. And entering upon a life of willing service to the Lord, he finds himself liberated from every other domination. No man is so independent as the one who waits upon God's commandment. To him nothing in life matters beyond the Divine approval. Every lower allegiance is discredited and dethroned when once the vital choice is made. He counts all things else as worthless—as indeed they are. And as he serves, his every capacity develops and his life enlarges to a degree otherwise impossible. The corn of wheat abides alone except it falls into the ground. It is the man who chooses the service of God as the supreme aim of his life who truly finds himself.

## JUDGES i. 1.

**Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?**

THE children of Israel, deprived of the presence of Joshua their leader, did not long maintain their professed faith in God. Confronted with the opposition of the inhabitants of the land, they soon forgot the far-reaching promises of the Lord's leadership and power in which they had previously confided; and without waiting for any Divine direction they queried thus as to their future. The threatenings of the Canaanites were too much for their faith, which had not learned to be reliant upon God, rather than upon any one of His servants. They lost the vision of the things not seen by reason of the insistence of those that were but too obvious. And, although the Lord met them, as He ever does, upon the level of their imperfect faith, the consequences of their weak hold upon His faithfulness were by no means obliterated, as the subsequent record attests.

It is always easier to walk by sight than by faith; and always less safe. When difficulties loom large and antagonisms are severe, we are all inclined to lean upon any available arm of flesh. The strength and visible resources of another seem so much more tangible than the mere promises of Divine assistance, that failure in this respect is quite explicable. Let us at all such times remember, however, that he honours God most who trusts Him most. On behalf of that man He never fails to show Himself mighty, nor to gird him with strength for the conflict. And when He arises His enemies are scattered, and they that hate Him flee before Him.

**I will never break My covenant with you.**

DISTRUST of God soon degenerated into positive defection upon the part of His people. Such is the uncertainty of human nature, even when it has been admitted to some knowledge of the Most High. Commanded as they had been, to make no league with the inhabitants of the land, but to overthrow them, they refused to obey ; and, in consequence, an angel messenger brought them this Divine reproof. Nothing was so likely to bring the enormity of their offence home to them as a reminder of the pledged faithfulness of God which they had outraged. The fact that He had given them such explicit assurance that His Covenant with them should stand fast, invested their disobedience with a moral quality which deepened their guilt. It is not to be wondered at that, taking this rebuke to heart, the people lifted up their voices and wept. For nothing pierces the heart so poignantly as the conviction of inexcusable ingratitude. Tears are often the most eloquent expression of regret.

There is always a note of wounded love in the Lord's reproofs of His people. He reminds us of His own grace in order to convict us of the insensate folly of departing from Him. How causeless and unjustified is our every disobedience ! How ungracious is the self-will which spurns His way only to take our own ! How blind, both to obligation and to highest interest, is the perversity which declines the yoke of such a faithful God ! And how wonderful in its transcendence of all these faults is the grace which bears with us and so lovingly corrects us. When He might overwhelm us with reproaches He overshadows us with mercy.

**To prove Israel by them.**

IT is very striking that God should leave some of the nations of Canaan unconquered as a discipline to His people. Compelled to engage them in conflict, their reliance upon God was thus tested. The difficulties of the situation provided them with the opportunity of seeking and realizing His help ; or, on the other hand, of manifesting a self-reliance which is the antithesis of faith. God's chief concern is not with the Canaanites at all, but with His own children. His purpose is to develop in them that attitude of entire confidence in Him, by which alone their moral development can be secured. It might have been easier for them had He entirely cleared the land of its inhabitants. But then they would have lost all that their necessary warfare called forth in them.

Thus is illustrated one of the processes of grace in the lives of God's people. He does not altogether take the difficulties out of any life, although it might sometimes seem as though Divine love should do so. Trials, obstacles, oppositions, and the like, are, however, allowed to remain with us in order to test, not merely our powers of endurance, but of dependence also. God never organizes a victory in any life when its outcome would be a moral impoverishment. But always on the contrary. He does not generally remove the thorn-pain, even though we beseech him thrice, for only by its inconvenience and hurt do we come to appreciate the grace that is sufficient. It is by these things that men live.

**The children of Israel cried unto the Lord.**

BEHIND the terror which Jabin, king of Canaan, inspired was the over-ruling purpose of God. He allowed this occasion of fear in order to teach His children their need of reliance upon Him. When men are untroubled they do not commonly realize their own insufficiency. When things are easy, and difficulties few, it is no uncommon thing for those who profess His name to depart in heart from their allegiance and dependence. Drifting is accomplished under sunny skies, and without any thought. Hence it is that God permits the threatenings of strong foes, and allows the darkening shadow of great difficulty to fall across the pathway of His people. His chief concern in regard to Israel was at all times directed toward their moral and spiritual advancement. Hence this providential arrangement which drove them in their fear and apprehension to prayer.

In His love God always takes the easiest way with His children. He does not willingly afflict them, nor suffer them to be troubled. When, however, gentler methods prove ineffective, He does not hesitate to bring such disturbance into their lives, as forces them to the Secret Place which has been neglected. Prosperous lives are apt to become prayerless. Lives undisturbed and untroubled not infrequently become indifferent and without concern regarding their true end. They lose the way into the Sanctuary, and too often lose also all desire to regain it. And it is the grace of God which brings salvation to all such in the disguise of an enmity which cannot be overcome unaided.

JUDGES v. 23.

Curse ye Meroz . . . because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

INACTION is sometimes positive sin. When moral issues are involved, to be neutral is to fail of duty. The sin of Meroz was of this order. In one of Israel's conflicts, when the co-operation of the people of that city would have been of signal advantage, they failed to render it. And their shortcoming was not forgotten against them. Theirs was the unenviable notoriety of having preferred self-interest to the strenuousness of warfare ; and upon them ultimately came the Nemesis of their own conduct. All of which is full of warning and meaning to those of our own day.

The Lord is ever seeking men who will engage with His foes in His strength. The Gospel not only cheers and comforts, but challenges us also to courageous devotion in respect of the highest cause of all. For Christ is eternally at war with sin, and those who would be His must likewise engage themselves. How many, alas, fail Him because of the conflicting claims of self-consequence and convenience ! Without attempting to dispute His right or to oppose His progress, they are content to remain passively indifferent. And in so doing they cover themselves with undying shame. Such are cursed, not by any fiat of Divine wrath, but by the recoil upon themselves of their own attitude. For every defection of this sort means deterioration of power, and loss of capacity. The law of reaction is never suspended in the spiritual realm of life. Men who fail in moral crises curse themselves, and not infrequently their descendants also.

**The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.**

THIS man of God was endued for the conquest of the Midianites as the outcome of his faithfulness to God. The entire record of the vision in which the Lord appeared to Him, and of Gideon's faithful and courageous response, is full of meaning. For he did not fear to talk with God face to face. Nor, having received commandment from Him, did he hesitate to cut down also the idol-groves of his father's house, and to break thus with every sinful tradition in which he was at all involved. The man who in secret is bowed before God cannot fail to be bold before men in active loyalty. When God finds such an one, with no confidence in his own resources, but willing to be led by His counsel, He never fails to equip and to establish him in His service.

Every outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord, of which the Old Testament gives record, is prophetic of His greater outpourings upon all flesh, of which the New Testament is the declaration, and the experience of every true believer an attestation. For the underlying principle and governing conditions are always the same. Faith, humility, and obedience are the attitudes of soul to which God always responds in like manner. Then, "endued with power from on High," the humblest of His children is prepared for conflict. The Spirit rests upon him for the impartation of those qualities which alone make for effectiveness against the foes of Christ and His cause. But apart from His anointing all service, however well-intentioned, is but presumptuous folly, and is foredoomed to failure.



**Empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.**

THE victory over Midian which God organized through Gideon was so ordered as to bring glory to none other but to His own name. From first to last the stamp of His mind is clearly upon the plan. Human wisdom is entirely suspended. An army weakened out of all proportion to the foe it must meet, and an equipment merely of pitchers and lamps, seemed altogether foolish ; and must certainly have tested the faith of Gideon and of all concerned. It is, however, God's way to confound the strong things by the weak, and to silence the wisdom of men by what looks like foolishness, that " no flesh should glory in His presence."

It is in earthen vessels that we have the treasure of eternal light, " that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us." And it is often by the breaking of the vessel that the light shines forth to the discomfiture of the Lord's enemies, and to the illumination of the world's darkness. May this not be an old-time parable interpreting many an otherwise inexplicable experience in the lives of His children ? Their aims are frustrated, their hopes destroyed, their very lives broken, and all, as it seems, without meaning or purpose. Yet it is under just such circumstances that the truly Christ-possessed believer shines most brightly for and by his Lord. The light of His love is never so clearly reflected as in a sorrow-dimmed life. The glory of His grace is never revealed so triumphantly as from out a broken heart. " This is the victory that overcometh the world." For this is faith indeed.

**The children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God.**

IT would almost seem impossible that, with such a record of God's faithfulness behind them, and such immediate experience of His goodness around them, the children of Israel should fail to remember Him. That their obligations sat so lightly upon them is a cause of wonderment, until we look into our own hearts. There we recognize instability of purpose which is an entire contradiction of our experience of God. We are startled to find the unsuspected tendencies to disloyalty which lurk within us who have received such unmeasured blessing. And we then cease to over-condemn the Israelites for their unfaithfulness, realizing that, but for God's unchanging mercy, our record had been no better in this respect than theirs. The heart of man is not only desperately wicked, but, above all things, deceitful ; and we well understand Israel's shortcoming by the light of our own.

It is not until a human prop is removed that we are able to comprehend how much we have been depending upon it. It was when Gideon died that the children of Israel fell in this manner. He had been to them the embodiment of faith in God ; and it had been easy for them to trust and follow Him with such a leader to inspire their confidence. Their bereavement was a vital test which found them wanting. And God similarly tests us by removing from our reach the merely supplementary inspirations by which our faith is often supported. For it is in this way that faith is purified, and translated from mere emotion into positive force.

**Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech.**

MEN may be emboldened to continue long in evil-doing by reason of God's seeming indifference. Abimelech slaughters his seventy brethren with little, if any, thought that retribution must follow such action as surely as night follows day. For since God is righteous none can break His law with impunity. With Him delay never means apathy. His eyes are in every place beholding the evil and the good. And with Him to see is to judge. At length the reckoning must be paid by every man who flouts His commandment. Ultimately "the soul that sinneth" dieth at the hand, not of an outraged God, but of its own transgression.

It is one of the gravest features of our day that men have largely lost sight of the holiness and majesty of God. In consequence, sin has for them lost its hideousness. Light views of wrongdoing are all too current among us. The fear of God is no longer before men's eyes; and many are, in consequence, emboldened to act in reckless defiance of His clearly-expressed Will. Hence the value of such a record as this, which reveals God's thought about sin, and awes us by its revelation of His power to punish the evil-doer. There is, at all times, a strong wooing note in the Evangel, to which we all gladly respond. But there is an equally strong warning note also, to which, if we are wise, we shall each give earnest heed. For the voice of warning, as of wooing, is the voice of the Father's love. Its purpose is to secure us against making tragic shipwreck of life by embarking upon courses which can have but one end.

**We have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.**

IT sometimes appears as though the Divine patience were stretched to breaking-point by the indifference and heedlessness of those whose professed faith is contradicted by their actions. Again and again Israel has sinned and repented and received God's forgiveness, only to turn to the worship of idols when occasion offered or temptation became too strong. At length God delivers them over to the gods for the worship of which they have forsaken Him. He lets them realize to the full the worthlessness of their every misplaced confidence in the deities of Canaan. He will no longer intervene to save them from their foes; for in this way only can they be brought to know the folly of their defection. When at last they are utterly defeated and exhausted, they will turn again to Him to find His love unchanged.

When forgiveness does not create a moral imperative within the soul of a man, its true nature is misconceived. God pardons His people that they may "go and sin no more" after that same sort. Alas, that His gifts should be so perverted, and that His love should be so outraged, as they often are by those who, while professing His Name, really devote their strength of life to other gods! The common worship of money, pleasure, ambition, success, and the like, is the sin of Israel in modern setting. Those who commit it relinquish their claim on God's promises. The exhaustion of His patience is reflected in the atrophy of their own desire for His fellowship.

JUDGES xi. 35.

I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.

JEPHTHAH'S noble vow was worthy of a better subject. The rash impetuosity of this impulsive soldier, while revealing a certain trait of high resolve which was in itself commendable, led only to disaster ; and forms the occasion of one of the saddest stories on record. A man may certainly do wrong and act foolishly when acting, as he believes, under a strong religious impulse. Any strong quality of human nature which is unrelated to God's revealed will, and unsundered to His governing power, is always a source of danger. Like another in later days, Jephthah verily thought that he ought to do this thing ; although it was ultimately seen to be entirely out of accord with every principle, alike of God's law and of true humanity. Even so, there is much to be admired and emulated in the old warrior's steadfastness of purpose, though it cost him that which was dearer than life. Such whole-hearted fidelity to conviction, even though it be mistaken, is all too rare.

Many men who make vows to the Lord, and afterwards realize their costliness, and the conflict with personal interest and convenience which they necessitate, do not hesitate to take back their words. Herein indeed is to be found the explanation of many an enfeebled life and worthless testimony. Calm deliberation at the beginning would have saved all such from a disaster worse than death. For to be ultimately insincere with the Lord, after having made high professions of devotion, is of all forms of guilt the worst. For it is the tap-root of every other sin.

**Say now Shibboleth.**

THE lingual test which the Gileadites imposed upon the fugitives of Ephraim, has come to stand for a certain kind of valueless and unreliable profession. Originally it was the somewhat astute use to which the men of Gilead put a curious provincial dialect then in vogue among the children of Ephraim. Unable to frame their lips with readiness to the pronunciation of the unfamiliar word, they were thus individually discovered to the enemy, and were slain. Their speech betrayed them.

The test of language is at once conclusive and inconclusive. Out of the abundance of the heart a man always speaks in his inconsidered and spontaneous utterances, which therefore attest his true quality. It is always safe to assume, when one's undeliberated conversation in the natural correspondences of life is of grace seasoned with salt, that the inner life is true. This is at least one of the attesting evidences of a child of God. On the other hand, speech is easily simulated, and for unworthy purposes men often assume language which is not natural to them and which is meaningless. The vocabulary of Zion is not difficult to copy on the part of one who is determined thereby to gain such advantage as may accrue to him by identification with its citizens. It is therefore never safe to form hasty judgments of any man upon his mere verbal professions of faith. And sooner or later the hypocrite invariably exposes himself to those upon whom he would impose. For when pious speech is not corroborated by holy living, the unreality is eventually not difficult to discern.

**Let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do.**

THE wife of Manoah was conscious that she had not made the most of the angel visitation by which she had been favoured. Possibly the greatness and unexpectedness of the promise he brought awed her to silence, while exalting her with a sense of God's goodness. Thus it was that, on recounting her experience to her husband, he entreated the Lord that the messenger should revisit them, not for their mere personal uplift, but that they might know more perfectly the will of the Lord concerning the child which was to be born to them according to His word. This is a prayer inspired by true fear of God on the part of two of His children, who desired above all things that they should not fail to realize His purpose.

The possibility of recapturing spiritual opportunity is one of the glad notes of the Evangel of Christ. It is not given to every man always to realize in the great hour of his life its true greatness. The mere setting of his experience may itself blind him to its large implicates ; and it is only when the high hour has passed that he realizes how much more fully he needs to apprehend God's purpose and power, if he is not to fall short of His glory. And God in His mercy answers the prayer of Manoah whenever it is sincerely offered. Again and again He comes to deepen the original inspiration, and widen the early vision by which life on high levels is alone sustained. This is the renewing of the Holy Ghost.



**The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.**

SAMSON was a Nazarite, a man who had been separated by his own voluntary choice and act unto the service, and Will, and purpose of God. Dedicated from birth by his godly parents, he had in himself ratified their vows ; and his acceptance by the Lord is attested in these words which frequently recur in the record of his life. The peculiar form which his enduement by the Spirit manifested, that of prodigious physical strength, was merely an adaptation to the need of the circumstances under which he judged Israel. The people of God, and their foes alike, could in that day be impressed more surely by the spectacular than the spiritual ; and hence it was that he was gifted to this end. That he was not without the grace as well as the gifts of the Spirit in some degree, is inferred by the fact that, at the beginning, at any rate, he did not boast of his feats, nor even record them to his parents. That he subsequently utterly failed to maintain that attitude before God in which the Divine enduement could be continued, is one of the tragedies of inspired history.

God always equips His surrendered servants for the peculiar work He has for them. Nor does He repeat Himself by making men of one pattern. The fashion of each life is the subject of His individual care and concern. The work of each is planned with due consideration of its influence upon that of the whole company of His people. And the necessary enduement of His Spirit is altogether unique in every life, though freely promised to all in Christ. To every man His power is divided severally according to the controlling Will.

**To bind Samson are we come up.**

THE beginnings of Samson's declension are clear and unmistakable. Under the influence of temptations inherent in his very strength, he began to have a light regard for his consecration vows. Indulgence of fleshly passions in directions contrary to the expressed will of God, soon led him to positively impious impurities. And yet all the time he maintained a certain religious regard for God, realizing himself in some degree as His chosen servant. Thus the wheat and the tares grew together in the field of a careless and untended life ; and it is not surprising that ultimately the tares succeeded in overrunning the whole. The adulteration of the sacred with the frankly earthly is at all times the beginning of moral disaster.

The Spirit-endued man has always to contend with strong and eager foes. Both within and without his life he finds them ; and he must ever be watchful and prayerful, lest they gain such an advantage in his life as will adversely affect the cause of God to which he is pledged. Samson, like many another, made easy conquest of his outside foes, only to fall a victim to those which harboured in his own nature. And herein is the peril of every Christian life. It is on the secret battlefield that most men are overcome. There is something of support in the very circumstances of conflict with the avowed enemies of the Lord. The thrill of battle sustains, and the joy of victory uplifts. But on the secret field there is no such stimulus. There a man must fight before the Lord. And there is discovered his true measure.

**And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.**

THERE is a terrible possibility that the man who has experienced the power of the Spirit in his life and work should become unusable, and should be set aside by God. Of such the Word of God furnishes many records for our warning, and none more striking than the case of Samson, who failed to fulfil God's easy and simple conditions, and so frustrated His grace to his own ruin. The pathos of his spiritual declension is in the fact that he did not recognize it. When the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, and when by his own trifling sinfulness he had forfeited the Divine pleasure, he went out as in former times to shake himself, thinking it would be with him as it always had been. But only to find himself at length in the hands of his enemies, a prisoner with his eyes put out, and powerless to avert their wrath.

It is pathetic that men should lose the presence and power of God unconsciously. While it is insisted upon in the Sacred Word that the Lord is 'able to keep' His children from falling, there is also the other side strongly expressed in such warnings as—"keep yourselves in the love of God," "keep yourselves from idols." And it is possible, even in face of the all-sufficiency of God's promise, so to fail in this respect as to render His power inoperative, and His promises nugatory. This state of things usually comes about so gradually, like the ravages of dry-rot or the creeping of a paralysis, that a man may all the time delude himself while his strength is ebbing away. The only safeguard for us all is utter sincerity in constant self-examination.

JUDGES xvii. 6.

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

SUCH a state of anarchy could not but have disastrous moral results among the people to whom a leader ideally represented the government of God. His Will, thus expressed, was a co-ordinating purpose which welded the actions and concerns of the nation into one complete witness. When this failed, confusion reigned. With no federal head of the Law which was professed, its sanctions and prohibitions lost force. As a mere abstract code it failed to evoke individual loyalty; and hence the state of things which is at this time variously described. All of which is illustrative of the effect, upon nation and individual alike, of dethroned control.

Many a life is like Israel in the fact that it suffers from lack of a king. Uncontrolled liberty is of all things the most disastrous—the forerunner of a thousand ills. God never meant us to be sufficient for life unaided and ungoverned. And it is only under the kingship of Jesus Christ that we ever realize His Will and approximate to His ideal. When He is enthroned in life, all power and passion is ennobled and delivered from the mere sordidness of self-pleasing. Every faculty is purified and captured for holy service. Every energy is directed toward the tasks of the Kingdom. And with every word of command comes adequate power for the fulfilment of loyal duty. To make Christ, therefore, the Sovereign of life's kingdom, is the secret of every good. To deny Him the crown-rights is to invite certain moral disaster.

And they set them up Micab's graven image, . . . all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

THE sin of the children of Dan is set forth here in detail, not only on account of its attendant features, but also because it was illustrative of the widespread defection from God to which the whole nation at this time was so prone. Superstition was rife throughout the land, and the state of religious chaos into which the people had fallen made it easy for both the individual and the community to turn to the idols of Canaan. It seems, however, to be a special point in the indictment against Dan that the Tabernacle of the congregation still remained where it had been originally set up at Shiloh, and that they attempted to combine the dual worship of Jehovah with that of graven images. It is this fact which singles them out for special condemnation.

The sin of the children of Dan is by no means confined to their age. When men decline in true faith, from whatever cause, it is no far step to the worship of idols. True, in this our day the idols to which men give allegiance and service are of other form than those of Israel's day. We do not bow down to graven images ; and yet we do give to such things as money, pleasure, and power that strength of life which rightly belongs to the Lord our God. An idol indeed in any life is that thing which successfully contests God's right, and controls more moral energy than is devoted to the doing of His Will. That such idol-worship is maintained along with a recognition of the House of God only adds to its guilt.

JUDGES xix. 6.

*Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.*

THIS shameful story of the Levite of Mount Ephraim casts a lurid light upon the moral condition of the people at that time. That a man dedicated to the service of God, should so play fast and loose with the moral law, and have so light a regard for his obligations as to mix himself with such company as that in which he is found, is a sad commentary on the state to which the people of God had fallen. For it is safe to infer that if such was the quality of the leaders, that of the rank and file was equally bad. The story of the house of licentious pleasure, and the gruesome outcome of the Levite's entanglement in its wickedness, is a grave warning of the possibilities of evil which lurk within the nature of all men, however high are their professions of faith in God.

When men begin to play with sin their moral powers of resistance are undermined, and ultimately it becomes impossible for them to hold out against the blandishments which seek to deceive. They are caught in the toils before ever they are aware : and to the repeated suggestions that they should tarry yet a little longer, and enjoy sin's pleasures yet a little more deeply, they are unable to say "no." Thus are men lured to destruction. The siren voice succeeds in casting a spell, under the power of which conscience is outraged, and its warning voice stifled. Until in the end, even men of professed faith are found doing things at which their whole nature would have cried out in revolt at the beginning. This is, indeed, the broad path of which the Gospel warns us all.

And the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until even, and asked counsel of the Lord.

IT is full of meaning that although the Israelites went up to battle against the children of Benjamin as a result of direct Divine sanction, they should yet be twice smitten before them. When they thought to inflict dire punishment they were themselves humbled ; as though to show that God had a controversy not only with the Benjamites, but with the rest of the people also. For this conflict was the direct outcome of the sin of the Levite of Mount Ephraim ; and while the Lord's displeasure was kindled against the men who were guilty of such outrage as in which that episode closed, He must also visit His displeasure upon the sin from whence it all arose. Thus it was that the discomfiture of Israel followed upon a definite drawing near to God in regard to this issue. Nor could its moral significance fail to impress them all the more deeply on this account.

God has no favourites. Every child of His who presumes to act contrary to His known Will must be disciplined. While it is of the Lord's love that we are chastened, it is of His mercy that we are not consumed. For sin in His people has an element of guilt which the sin of the world does not carry. Therefore, while He may use Israel to punish Benjamin, Israel is by no means herself allowed to go unpunished. And this fact is written large in all history. Who shall say that it has not received fresh illustration in the events of our own day ? For while wanton bloodshed and impious outrage must be punished, so also must Sabbath-breaking, worldliness, and contempt of God's Word. No amount of formal piety can avert the consequences of public sin. God forgives both men and nations ; but He punishes also their wickedness.



JUDGES xxi. 8.

What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the Lord?

THE punishment of the men of Jabesh-Gilead for holding aloof from the national concern which followed the slaughter of the Benjamites, was visited upon them speedily. No details are furnished in explanation of their attitude : but it was evidently regarded as expressing either indifference or cowardice, and was held to merit condign punishment. The border-line between right and wrong, obligation and inclination, responsibility and self-interest, is always clearly marked ; and men must take up their position on one side or another. It may seem a harsh and unjustified proceeding that in this instance those who had refrained from throwing in their lot with the nation should be mercilessly put to death. As an exhibition, however, of the guilt of attempted moral neutrality it is a striking warning.

Deep in the instinct of humanity, and written also in the Law of God, is contempt for the craven spirit which seeks only its own advantage, and looks at nothing beyond its own interests. Christ Himself taught that the man who attempts to save his own life inevitably loses it. When the trump of God summons His professed servants to take share in His warfare against evil, that man is condemned who remains passively indifferent, engrossed in his own concerns, and without care for the larger interests of the Kingdom of God. It does not require that he should be in active opposition to be written down as an enemy of the Cross. It is enough that he comes not up to Mizpeh to the Lord.

For whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

THIS expression of Ruth's devotion to Naomi is perhaps the finest tribute to the power of human affection of which there is any record. It involved the leaving of her own land and people, and the facing of an unknown future in entirely new and uncertain surroundings. It was the beginning of a new life, whose issue she could by no means know. Obeying the dictates of her heart, however, in a deliberate and considered consecration, she realized her true life. For in the land of her adoption she found the kinsman-redeemer, to whom she was eventually united in marriage. And she thus became an ancestress in the flesh of the Messiah.

The sacrifices of true love are sometimes wrongly attributed to blindness. Emotion is regarded as impairing the power of vision. As a matter of fact this is the actual opposite of truth. Love is, however, always content to be misinterpreted by mere onlookers. Its satisfactions are in itself. While giving all, Ruth gains and receives a thousand-fold for every sacrifice to which her heart prompts her. And so it is always with the one who adopts her language to express relationship with the Great Lover of our souls, to Whom, indeed, it is in its fullest meanings alone applicable. The clinging devotion to Christ which springs from grateful recognition of what He is, enriches life beyond all thought. And ever and anon it finds that its highest desires are but responsive to His own. We love Him, only because He first loved us.

RUTH ii. 19.

Where hast thou gleaned to-day?

NAOMI'S concern for Ruth on their settlement in Bethlehem, and the steps she took to order her course wisely, is a record of controlling Providences. It is evident that behind her affectionate planning was the overruling mind of the God she served. Thus was Ruth led to the field of Boaz, whose life was henceforth, in the purpose of God, to be so closely bound up with her own. In the path of such diligent service as was open to her, the goodness of God met her. It was as the gleaner in the field, content to gather a few handfuls of corn, and toiling to this end under the hot harvest-sun, that she found the golden hour and the great opportunity of her life.

It is always in the way of duty that God's best gifts come to men. There is nothing of kinship between heavenly gifts and earthly slackness. When men are faithful in regard to the things of work and duty, they qualify themselves for entrustment with the true riches. But the devotion to responsibility, which capacitates the spirit of a man to recognize God, must be directed upon the field of His appointment. The point of Naomi's query in its significance to us is, that it matters not only how one glean, but where also. For it is in the place of God's own ordering that we are sure to meet Him, in the opportunities, the obligations, and the unexpected gifts which are there found. To commit the so-called secular things of life to Him, and to seek His glory in respect of them, is to realize the highest ennoblement of life, of which Ruth's experience is but dim illustration.

**He will tell thee what thou shalt do.**

THUS did Naomi counsel Ruth in regard to her relationship with Boaz ; and her words were as the counsel of God to the maiden. For she realized that it was God Himself Who was weaving the threads of her daughter-in-law's destiny. In obedience to her direction, Ruth was guided to the pathway of her true life. And in this Naomi spoke with larger meaning and application than she knew. For her words express the golden rule for all who in every age would enter into the blessing of close and saving union with Him, of Whom Boaz is a type.

" Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " is the instinctive cry of an awakened soul. Dimly apprehending that it is with Him we have to do, the one who is aroused to concern about his relationship with Christ can ask no surer direction than this. And it is from His own lips that we hear the Gospel of repentance, renunciation, and reception. It is He Himself, and none other, Who shows us not only the first, but every successive step in the journey of life. In this, how entirely also does He fulfil throughout life the promise of His first gift. Perplexity and mystery often seem to surround the life of the believer. Alike in his personal concerns, and in his service for the Kingdom, the need of clear guidance again and again presses upon him. And in every great hour of need, the assurance that " He will tell thee what thou shalt do " is borne in upon his mind by the Spirit of God. Then in faith he responds, " Thou wilt show me the path of life "—and waits.

Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife,

THUS is the story of the Moabitess consummated. Her devotion to Naomi, and adoption of the pilgrim-life in company with her, is at length rewarded and crowned. She is raised to the dignity of honourable union with this high-souled man, and becomes a mother in Israel, a forerunner of David and of David's Greater Son. Truly, the record of her life is a magnifying of the grace of God, Who takes the obscurest and humblest and sets them among the princes of His people.

How much greater are God's thoughts than ours ; and what large issues proceed from apparent trivialities in the life which is yielded to Him ! If this is rightly recognized, life cannot fail to be invested with seriousness to us all. For upon a single step may depend purposes vaster than mind can comprehend. A choice of apparently negligible importance may be the seed of a harvest greater than any individual life can ever reap. We are constantly living in the midst of latent forces which we can neither measure nor control ; and the very greatness of life in this respect should make us sensitively careful in regard to its every detail. A thoughtless act, a winged word, an undisciplined thought, may each have far-reaching consequences in the frustration of the Divine plan for our highest well-being. On the other hand, scrupulous faithfulness always means ultimate exaltation. If this is not so in worldly concerns, it is most certainly true in regard to spiritual influence and power.

Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord.

GOD'S faithfulness to Hannah in hearkening to her prayer and fulfilling her desire, evoked this responsive gratitude. The child, for whose birth she had made earnest petition, was regarded as being, in no sense, her own. God's good gift could only be worthily treasured by being given back to Him for His service. The greatness of His love and favour inspired within her a true spirit of devotion, so that she renounced all claim to the ordering of her son's life, and placed him again in the Hand of Love from whence she received him. And in doing so, she set him in that way of God's commandments in which his true life was alone found.

There is a reasonableness in the demands of Divine love which the hearts of His people instinctively recognize. They have nothing that they have not received of Him. Enrichment involves obligation. It is the mercies of God which generate the impulse by which its recipients present themselves unto Him as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, which is their reasonable service. And it is on this wise that they come to know the true meaning of life. Its only worthy interpretation is spiritual. Its gifts, rightly conceived, are capacities for His service and glory. We lose what we keep for ourselves, and gain eternally only that by which we seek to do Him service. The influence of Samuel's life and ministry is the final justification of Hannah's sacrifice. And our surrendered possessions likewise become God's media of blessing to the world.

**Them that honour Me, I will honour.**

THE message of the anonymous man of God which was sent to Eli as a reproof and warning declares for all time one of the outstanding principles of the life of God's children. It is an anticipation of the Saviour's own word which bids men "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," with the assurance that all needful things shall follow their intensity of purpose. And from Eli downwards we have the record of a long chain of witnesses who have failed thus to honour God, and upon whom has come the certain Nemesis of His disregarded Law. The adoption of a life-centre is always of supreme importance. For not only is there subjective influence, but objective consequence also dependent thereon. The one who makes the doing of God's Will the supreme purpose of his being is purified in the springs of his own life, and is exalted to the dignity of influence in His service.

To honour God does not necessarily imply doing great things for Him. It is rather the consistently maintained attitude of heart which refers every choice to His judgment, measures every value by His standard, and endeavours to make every incident of life contribute toward the glorifying of His Name. Such a life may secure little or no public recognition ; but "the Lord knoweth them that are His." Secret faithfulness has a quality and a value in His sight which public activities, however worthy, do not bear. And at the end of the day it will be seen that those who have resolutely set the Lord always before them are called to the highest honour of His Kingdom.



**Samuel . . . opened the doors of the house of the Lord.**

AFTER such a wonderful night in which God had appeared to Samuel, and had committed to him the knowledge of His purpose which transformed the boy into a man, it almost seems an anti-climax that on the following day he should be engaged in such commonplace concerns as are here recorded. It might have been thought that he would immediately assume the prophetic office, and declare on the house-top the things he had heard in secret. But the time for that was not yet come ; and hence the first consequence of his communion with God was his devotion to ordinary duty. In this Samuel is an example to all who have been brought into the secret of the Lord.

The loftiest spiritual enduements, rightly conceived, prepare men for the doing of lowliest tasks in the high spirit of devotion to the Lord. Too often matters of practical duty are disregarded, or at best are but carelessly performed under the stress of compulsion, by those who desire to be God's servants. In consequence the Holy Name by which they are called is brought into discredit, and the cause which they sincerely have at heart suffers. We need to realize that the life of a true child of God does not consist of doing extraordinary things, but of carrying out ordinary duties and tasks in an extraordinary spirit. And in so doing any one of us is opening the doors of the house of the Lord, and making it possible for other lives to come under the saving influence of His Sanctuary. Such is the great possibility of which every common day is full.

**The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.**

HEREIN lay the bitterness of the Philistinish victory over Israel. That their choicest young men had been slain in battle, and their army overcome, was an experience which could be borne. For had they not precedents which warranted the confidence that reconstruction could be effected and future victory organized? But that the Ark, the sacred symbol of God's presence with His people, should fall into the hand of their foes was disastrous beyond repair. For Israel's strength lay in her consciousness that God dwelt in the midst of His people. The entire national life centred round that place where the Ark rested. The history of the nation was bound up with His appearings on the Mercy-Seat. Whatever of blessing and victory had been experienced, it was instinctively recognized by all as having direct connection with God's visible dwelling-place. That this should now be lost, meant that all was lost.

There is a close spiritual analogy between the experience of Israel in this crisis and that of God's people to-day. For as the Ark was lost to Israel, so the consciousness of God's presence may be lost by His people for the same reason. Wilful sin and insincerity involves forfeiture of His sanctifying power. No tragedy is so great in any life as that of grieving the Holy Spirit, and so losing the reality of His indwelling influence. However zealously such an one may maintain his former activities, the real glory of his life has departed. And of all things the most important to him is to recover the Ark at all costs.

**The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us.**

THE act of the Philistines in setting up the captured Ark in the house of Dagon their god, was not so much impious as ignorant. They did not know the moral character of God, and, consequently, did not apprehend the entire contradiction between all that the Ark stood for of holiness and righteousness, and all that Dagon represented of licentious worship. Their surprise at the self-assertion of God in respect of their idol is not unnatural; nor is their endeavour to reinstate the fallen god in the hope of establishing a dual deity, that they might secure the help of Israel's God along with the benefits of Dagon's rule. When forced, however, to a clear issue between them, they determined that Dagon should be their choice.

There are many who act under similar circumstances just as the Philistines did. Their attempt to divide the worship of their hearts between the god of this world and God revealed in Christ, is brought home to their conscience as an impossibility; and they are compelled to make choice. The cost of enthroning the true Lord is, however, realized only too well; and they sacrifice conviction for self-interest. Like the Gadarenes, also, who besought Christ to leave their coasts because His presence disturbed their unholy occupation and gain, such ones deny Him the sovereign place in life because they cannot have both Him and their idols. To determine that the Ark of God shall not abide with us, is to write ourselves down as unworthy of Eternal life.

**He smote the men of Beth-shemesb, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord.**

GOD'S anger at the unholy curiosity of these men was neither arbitrary nor meaningless. That sacred emblem of His presence among men was fenced about with restrictions and prohibitions which unmistakably set forth His holiness. Since it represented His dwelling-place, it was to be at all times the object of reverence and awe. For He was the God of Heaven, into Whose presence sinful men could not come except on the ground of shed blood. The violation of this inevitable moral order could never be a light thing. Hence the exemplary punishment of the men of Beth-shemesh, who presumptuously peered into the Ark, degrading thus the conception of God to that of the level of heathen deities.

There is a holy curiosity—the curiosity of a little child—which seeks to discover God in the heights and depths of His nature, and which is always rewarded. “They shall find Me when they shall seek Me with their whole heart” is His promise in this respect. But there is also an unspiritual and unholy curiosity which recoils upon those who are guilty of it. Attempted penetration of the Divinely-ordered mystery which shrouds alike much of our present life and of the future also, is commonly attended with disastrous result. The things that are hidden are hidden for our highest good. It is the glory of God sometimes to conceal His ways from His people. Those who give themselves over to irreverent curiosity lose that spiritual conception of God and His ways which is the foundation of true faith and worship. And such loss is irreparable.

**Eben=ezer saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.**

EBENEZER was the scene of Israel's conflict with the Philistines, in which the Ark of God was taken from them. Now it has become the place of glorious victory ; for God has scattered their enemies and re-established them in His favour. The clearly outlined steps of repentance and return to the Lord, to which they had been directed by Samuel, were the necessary prelude to God's intervention on their behalf. For since their former defeat had a moral cause, so the pathway to victory was a moral one. It was the putting away of their idols, and the offering of the whole burnt-offering in accompaniment of their cry to God, which attested their sincerity, and made possible also the putting forth of His power. Their strongest foes were in themselves. When these were conquered, the way was made clear for God to assert Himself on their behalf. And this He did in such a way as that no doubt could rest in the mind of any as to Who was the Author of their deliverance.

Experience of God's grace exerted on behalf of His people, always involves them in new obligations of devotion and loyalty. The "hitherto" of His blessing involves the "henceforth" of our consecration. And the memory of His unfailing faithfulness is likewise an abiding inspiration in the future days of unexpected difficulty and unusual strain. Every life has its "Ebenezer" ; and when it is difficult to peer through the darkness which is ahead, it is always possible to look backward at this bright light. Thus is fear dispelled and courage inspired. For memory reinforces faith, and reassures the sinking heart that He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

I SAMUEL viii. 7.

**They have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.**

THE nation's desire for a king had a deeper meaning than appeared on the surface. Not only did it express their wish to be put under the visible leadership of an earthly sovereign as were the surrounding nations, but it also betokened the fact of their dissatisfaction with the Divine rule. God had made them for Himself, and only by His government could they realize their ideal life. He designed that they should be the religious educators of the whole world, manifesting the blessedness of His control, and thus witnessing to the perfection of His character. With everything to aid them for walking by faith, they turned from Him to walk by sight. And while He allowed this their request, it was only that they might ultimately realize the futility of departure from Him. For to this day Israel awaits her true King.

The virtual rejection of God's rule is, by no means, exclusively the sin of Israel. In nations and individuals alike it has been repeated down the centuries, and to a large degree is still characteristic of contemporary life. For of how many is it true that they have preferred to give their life-allegiance to some other king, and to walk according to another rule than that of the Lord God? And of how many, too, is it true, that though unchecked in their choice, leanness has nevertheless come into their souls? Like Israel, none of us can ever be the man God intended him to be, apart from loyal submission and active obedience to His sovereignty. "Under which King?" is a searching but altogether wholesome self-scrutiny for us all.

He that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.

THIS explanatory interpolation in the record of those days is altogether full of meaning and instruction to all who endeavour to do the service of God in the world. The ideal conception of a prophet is not one who *foretells*, but who *tells forth* what he has heard and seen in his secret communion with God. He must have vision of God's ways and purpose before he can give voice to His message. He must cultivate the art of seeing as the necessary preliminary to that of speaking. He must live in two worlds, maintaining face to face fellowship with God in secret, and hand to hand touch with the affairs and needs of his day. Such an one will not speak in vain when he opens his mouth to declare the Word of the Lord. Like Christ Himself, he will but declare that which he has learned "in the bosom of the Father."

Much of the failure of modern prophecy is the outcome of virtual blindness. We do not wait to see before rushing forth to proclaim. The vision of God is not impressed upon our own inner consciousness, because we do not tarry long enough in His presence. For the clouds that hide Him do not melt in a moment, and the seer must, above all things, be a man of patience. Nor can the height and depth of God's grace be known of any man in brief and hurried visits to the Sanctuary. Eternity's secrets are slowly imparted, but at all times surely to the man who will take time to behold the King in His beauty. Such an one does not fail to approve himself the prophet of the Lord to his generation.



**God gave him another heart.**

THUS was the Divine choice of Saul confirmed to him. The miracle of a transformed disposition was effected within him as a preparation for the duties of the office to which he was called. These called for qualities to which, hitherto, he had been a stranger. Heavier responsibilities than he had yet sustained were henceforth to rest upon him ; and consequent upon his position, the issues of his life were to be far greater than those of any man of his day. And it is as though God gave him the best possible start in the new life. That he subsequently failed to maintain an attitude of resolute faithfulness toward the Lord, and so lost the continued influence of the transforming Spirit, is one of the tragic records of the inspired Word. But for his failure God could be held in no way responsible. He, for His part, never fails men who, for their part, endeavour to abide faithful.

How heartening to those who are called to do service for the Lord is the confident assurance that His grace is sufficient. No man is sent forth to warfare at his own charges, nor is any commissioned to the work of the Kingdom apart from Divine enduements. The ordination of the Pierced Hands confers adequacy of strength for every task. This same miracle of transforming grace is experienced in all its essential features by each yielded servant. And from that hour there rests upon one and all of us the responsibility of being courageously true to the holy alliance.

**Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.**

IT was true spiritual instinct on the part of the prophet which summoned the people after the victory over the men of Jabesh-Gilead to a solemn act of rededication to the Lord. For victory is apt to make a nation or an individual headstrong and self-reliant, if God is not acknowledged as its inspiration. To renew the kingdom with solemn sacrifices, in the place already sanctified by memory of God's goodness, was of the highest moral value at such a time. For if God is not honoured in the high hour of the nation's success, their victory will prove ultimately more tragic and costly than defeat. And so it is in every life.

Each spiritual experience of God's favour and grace must be the starting-point of new fealty, otherwise it ultimately becomes a mere enslaving memory, which blinds men to the real character and need of their lives. Moreover, unless each mark of His favour evokes new gratitude and thanksgiving, it merely hardens the spirit, and eventually incapacitates for further service those who, in former days, have been useful and fruitful. After every triumph, small or great alike, it is the safety of the soul to get back to the Cross. For there in the clear light of Heaven we realize God's goodness and our own littleness; and there each mercy becomes a new cord to bind us as living sacrifices yet more firmly to the altar. Pride is checked at its beginnings, and befitting humility nurtured, only in this way.

**Consider how great things He hath done for you.**

THUS does Samuel summarize his parting injunctions to the people to whom he has been for so long as God's representative. With no hint of personal resentment, he relinquishes his leadership to the king of their choice, openly charging himself with the duty of continual intercession both on his behalf and theirs. He realizes that for him the purposes of God are changed and is content. At the same time, he impresses upon them that the principles of God's government are unchanged; and urges upon them the entire necessity of cleaving to Him with full strength of heart. And to encourage them in this, he bids them meditate on what they already know of His majesty and mercy. They will not readily transfer their hearts' allegiance from God to the earthly king they have chosen if they keep well in mind their indebtedness to Him.

Forgetfulness is the root whence faithlessness springs. We are all apt to dwell insufficiently on our indubitable experiences of God. Did we but habitually consider the great things He has done for us, we should never fall under the temptations to doubt and despair by which we are often assailed. For however troubled and threatened the present may be, it can never take from us the facts of the past. Every Christian life is rich in sanctifying memory; but most of us do not count our riches often enough. And thus we fail to realize the infinite resources which are still available for our present and future need. For God is not impoverished by all His giving.

Because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.

SAUL soon manifested the instability of his own nature in early departing from the clearly indicated Will of God. The whole episode reveals an impatient petulance, which ill-accommodated with the office he held by Divine permission. Although it might seem as though the penalty was disproportionate to the offence, yet in no other way could the enormity of revolt against the commandment of the Lord be brought home either to king or people. For God will not be trifled with. He who deals faithlessly with His Word makes sacrifice of all the possibilities of his life. Saul's forfeiture of the kingdom, his loss of God's favour and of influence with the people, and the sad story of dispeace and disappointment, and ultimately of violent death, of which this incident is the first stage, all attest the folly of his wilful departure from God's direction. And this is a warning to us.

Christ's yoke is easy, and the burden which His servants bear is light. When for any reason they refuse it in favour of self-government, it is only to bring upon themselves incalculable loss. For in the way of His commandments alone is fulness of life realizable by any. The things which men sacrifice in order to ensure for themselves fancied freedom from restraint, are beyond all count. For none can retain his privileged influence for God, which is the real crown of any life, apart from utter faithfulness to His apprehended Word. How unspeakable, therefore, is the madness which trifles with His commandments!

There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.

JONATHAN'S confidence in this crisis betokens his steady growth in the knowledge of God through ordinary days and duties. Faith is never a spasmodic effort to which the soul is girded by unusual circumstances. Jonathan is calm when confronted by strong foes, because he has come to know God's ways and His might beforehand. Nor is he ashamed to confess his faith, and to disclose the secret of his confidence. As his firm trust is in God's power which co-operates with individual weakness, so he would give Him the glory ere ever he enters the conflict. He is one of the forerunners of that race, which has always been the world's illumination, of those who fear men little because they fear God much.

In the many tasks and difficulties which confront the Christian Church, the one thing needful to ensure success is a large conception of God's power, with a practical submission to His control. Challenged by many obstacles, and opposed by many foes in the carrying out of Christ's commission, it is yet the strength of the feeblest of His followers to know that His work is ideally carried on, not by might nor power, but by His Spirit. God is not always on the side of big battalions. More can be wrought by truly surrendered weakness than is ever accomplished by self-sufficient strength. Hence no task to which any of His children is committed is a forlorn hope. When the love of Christ is the constraint which moves us to courageous self-sacrifice, we may always rest assured that our feebleness is no restraint to the Lord.

**To obey is better than sacrifice.**

SAMUEL'S scathing rebuke of Saul expresses one of those great principles of life which are apposite to every age and circumstance. The King in headstrong impetuosity had disobeyed the Divine command in regard to the slaughter of the Amalekites. In order if possible to cover his disobedience, he made excuse as to his purpose of sacrifice to the Lord. But He is not so propitiated. Samuel's righteous indignation in pronouncing sentence of deposition upon the unfaithful sovereign, sets forth the issue in unmistakable clearness. Worship can never be an accepted substitute for practical obedience to God's apprehended will. The elaboration of ritual and sacrifice by no means atones for any disregard of plain direction. Saul loses his kingdom because he had first lost his soul.

To the true believer there can be no alternative to direct and implicit obedience to God's Word. It is never sufficient to excuse any defection from the path of duty by engagement in other service, however worthy in itself. For God's commandments are the expression of His inviolate purpose. To offer Him, therefore, anything less than whole-souled obedience is to do despite to His grace. Such sacrifice as Saul would offer may easily be simulated without either moral motive or meaning. True obedience, however, is the pathway of the Cross, and involves self-denial and crucifixion. And this is the way of God's glory, and of life's highest good. Samuel expresses the golden rule for all time.

**The Lord looketh on the heart.**

THE prophet had almost been carried away by the appearance of Eliab into making a disastrous mistake. For Israel had already had experience of a king whose chief characteristic was his eminent physical stature. To have chosen and anointed another because of his bodily qualifications would have been but to perpetuate the evils of Saul's reign. Thus it is that God Himself speaks into His servant's ear this word which stays his hand from ill-timed action. The supreme qualification for the service of God is character. A good minister must first of all be a good man. "The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart." Hence, in seeking for those to whom He can commit the interests of His Kingdom, God has special regard to the secret springs of men's lives.

Christ comes to the soul, not to find perfection, but to make it. This fact at once humbles and encourages us. None of us can offer Him anything of worth beyond honest sincerity of purpose and aim. But this is sufficient. The anointing of His Spirit is bestowed upon all such, qualifying them by Divine endowment for every responsible task in the service to which He assigns them. True success in the Kingdom of God is not the outcome of mere natural gifts which have been consecrated, but of spiritual gifts which have been imparted. Since this is so, no one need despair whose heart is right toward God. For His canons of choice exclude none whose whole desire is to His Name. He bestows the dignity of His Service not as the world gives its honours. In His sight little ones are great.



**I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts,**

DAVID is able to disregard Goliath's proud challenge and boastful contempt because of his own consciousness of God's presence with him. He has not sought the conflict, and only engages in it because of a religious impulse which he cannot withstand. To see the armies of God's people defied by the Philistines and their champion, is to him a cause of deep shame. For it is the Name of the Lord Whom he loves and serves which is thus brought into dishonour. The boy who has held communion with Him on the hill-side becomes a man in the presence of that which threatens His glory in the plain. His fearlessness is an expression of His faith. He is bold before the foe because he has been bowed before Heaven. He knows his God, and hence is not deterred from undertaking exploits for Him, which all others are afraid to face.

David's fight with Goliath is a vivid picture of the conflict which every believer has to wage with giant sins and oppositions. In every life these proudly and constantly contest our faith ; and each of us must engage in single-handed combat with them. But always with the certainty of triumph, if, like David, we go forth to meet them in the Name of the Lord of Hosts. What could be weaker than an unarmed stripling opposed by a towering giant ? But what is stronger than such an one girt with the invisible armour of God ? Only let us bear in mind that the Name of God is not to be lightly used. It is a serious responsibility to be the custodian of His honour before men,—a responsibility for which only communion with Him qualifies any man.

**He loved him as his own soul.**

THE love between David and Jonathan was of all things the unlikeliest. Their respective interests were mutually contradictory ; for if David's cause is to succeed it can only be as Jonathan's hopes are frustrated. Jonathan, however, recognized the indebtedness, alike of himself and of his nation, to the one who had risked his life and had wrought so signal a victory as David had done in his conflict with Goliath. Thus the unlikely thing happened ; and Jonathan loved his deliverer with all the strong devotion of an awakened heart. Henceforth no sacrifice of interests weighed with him if he could but further the cause of his friend. And he for ever stands out as a conspicuous example of true devotion.

The abiding value of such a story is in the illuminating light it casts upon our professed devotion to David's Greater Son. He Who brought to naught our great enemy, and delivered us from his power by His own death, appeals by His sacrifice to the instinct of grateful love in us all. And though nothing is less likely than the union between such diverse elements as are severally in Christ and in us, yet is this miracle of love effected wherever a man truly realizes the obligation which Calvary sets up. Then, as with Jonathan in regard to David, the language of his heart is—that He must increase, even though it means that I must decrease. Thus it is that human lives become stepping-stones upon which Christ ascends to His high seat of conquest and government in the world. Do we love Him enough to deny to ourselves everything which conflicts with His exaltation ?

**Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father.**

FROM his secret meetings with his friend, Jonathan returned to the court of his father Saul, where the name of David was hated and execrated. And there he "spake good of David" with reckless disregard of consequences, just because his heart was full of him. For such was Saul's hatred of David that any one who ventured to speak good of him involved himself in the same treatment as that which David had formerly received at his hand. Thus Saul's anger was kindled against his own son on this account, and he "cast a javelin at him, to smite him." So Jonathan shared the malicious treatment accorded to his friend; and in this fellowship of suffering the bonds of love which bound them were still more strongly forged.

It is relatively easy to speak good of Christ among His friends. Where we have to speak good of Him, however, if we love Him, is at the court of Saul where His Name is blasphemed, where our testimony confronts iniquity, impurity, and unholiness, and where His enemies are in power. If we love Him, we must go down from our secret communion with Him, and speak good of His Name by the silent operations of a holy life lived in His power, and by unfaltering and unwavering words of witness which come from surrendered lips. But be assured that the world will treat us, when thus we speak good of our Lord, just as it treated Him. "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household." The measure of our love and loyalty to His Name is faithfully recorded in the weight of the Cross which is laid upon us as His followers.

Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.

THERE is no word in all literature, sacred or profane, which is so expressive of the unreserve which is the hall-mark of real love in its surrender to the loved one, as is this. Jonathan had by this time begun to know what it cost to be David's friend ; and yet not only does he never shrink from the fulfilment of their early covenant, but goes right on knowing that for him the end is death. Nothing is more touchingly beautiful than this record of his going out to meet David in the place of his exile, there to confirm and renew the former vows of his love in this deliberate declaration. Here is the heroism of a soul that is invincible, because it has found a true objective for its passion.

Christ seeks nothing less than the uttermost consecration from His friends and followers. In words such as these they may profess their devotion ; but they must subsequently translate them into heroic deeds if their self-dedication is to be of any worth. They must be willing to go where He sends, to attempt what He commands, and to be what He desires. And at all times they have the certain consciousness that every command of His brings its own enduement, and that in all the pathway of life He is with them in the power of an indissoluble union. This it is that gives them courage, and makes them utterly regardless of cost or consequence in the carrying out of His desires. And this is the explanation of the triumph of His Church in every age. If our love to Him is not characterized by similar entire absence of holding back, we have yet to learn what it means to be His friend. And is He not worthy of our all—and infinitely more ? For is not our completest offering altogether insufficient to express our indebtedness ?

**There is none like that ; give it me.**

THE sword of Goliath brought back to David's mind that great experience of his life, in which the power of God was shown through his weakness to the liberation of the people from the yoke of the Philistines. It was not on account of its size or strength, and still less for the feats which Goliath had performed by its aid, that it was so desirable in his eyes. Hard pressed as he then was, and sorely in need of assistance, that sword represented to him the greatness of God's mercy. The mere fact that it was not available for his use was an inspiration to fresh faith and courage. For while it is unlikely that he had the physical strength to wield the weapon of the giant, the same God Who had of old wrought such a great deliverance was still with him. The last time that sword had been in his hand was when he had used it to cut off the head of the slain giant. Now, in his present difficulties, he could still rely upon the Divine help which had not failed him in that day, nor since.

The memory of God's past deliverances is always an aid to present trust. Although difficulties assume new forms, and unexpected demands are made upon our courage, we have each an unfailing source of encouragement in our past experiences of the Lord. Like Goliath's sword, there is in every Christian life some conspicuous trophy of grace, which, while we do not display to others, we do well to frequently consider for ourselves. For each reminds us of mercy which has never yet miscarried, and of grace which is still sufficient to bring us through.

**Every one that was in distress . . . in debt . . . discontented, gathered themselves unto him.**

IT was a strange company which rallied to David in Adullam. Gathered from the least likely sections of the people, each with his own private grievance or grudge, they gathered to him because they believed that under him they might eventually come to their own. It would be expecting too much to look in such a crowd for uniformly worthy motive. And this fact makes it all the more wonderful that David should succeed in creating an army out of such elements. It is a rare tribute to his personal influence over the hearts of men not readily disposed to submit to discipline, that he should succeed in welding them into one body, with one purpose, and one loyalty. And so great was his hold upon them that eventually it was by means of these very men that he realized his kingdom.

There is an obvious analogy between this instance and the gathering together of all kinds of distressed and discontented men to Jesus Christ. Some are impelled to Him by their conscious need of refuge from an oppressor. They are in debt, and from none other can they secure help. Others are drawn to Him by their very discontent with life. They have come to know how flavourless and insipid are its best things ; and in sheer world-weariness they turn to Him who has raised the standard of Life where the world's ways converge. And Christ makes such men into saints and soldiers. They commit themselves to Him ; and He, in turn, commits His cause to them, and qualifies them for its successful prosecution.

**Jonathan . . . strengthened his hand in God.**

AS the end approached, and the final inevitable struggle loomed near, David's courage not unnaturally fluctuated. Between him and the consummation both of his hopes and of God's promises there seemed to be insuperable difficulties, and a sore conflict with unequal forces. Jonathan, on the other hand, saw clearly whither events were moving. The fortunes of his father Saul, with which his own were so closely bound up, were fast ebbing ; and he had come to acknowledge that he himself would never reign. And yet he could rise above his own concerns, and with a heart at leisure from itself, could go forth to strengthen the hand of his friend. Nowhere have we such a perfect illustration of the love which "seeketh not her own."

The truest service which men can render one to the other is that which strengthens their mutual hold upon God. This is the greatest mission of Christian friendship ; and its exercise always necessitates Jonathan's complete detachment from all selfish concern. For it is only in the heart which has renounced everything in life except the will of God that He sheds abroad His own love, to be poured forth in turn as life-giving cordial to others. And how potent is this ministry at all times ! Many an one has been saved from despair—and from the sins of despair—by its timely influence. And many another has been strengthened to accomplish great things for God by reason of the encouragement of some quite obscure Jonathan. Why should we not all qualify for such a ministry ?



**I** will not put forth my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.

DAVID'S magnanimity in dealing with the royal enemy who had so unexpectedly been delivered into his hand, could not fail to be misunderstood by his own adherents. Neither could such an one as Saul understand it ; for it was entirely contrary to the spirit of vindictiveness and enmity which characterized combatants of that day. David, however, had learned to look upon life as having a spiritual interpretation. He knew that God intended to raise him to the throne ; and realized that to take a short cut thither by stretching out his own hand to slay Saul would have been a contradiction of the faith he professed. He believed God, and therefore could await His time with patience. It was not because the person of the sovereign was sacrosanct that he refrained from slaying him ; but because he recognized that God had put Saul on the throne, and would depose him in his favour at the right time.

Many a good man makes the fatal mistake of endeavouring to hasten the fulfilment of God's plans. There are occasions when it is hard not to take the matter into one's own hands—to cut the Gordian knot of difficulty, and make a short road to a desired end. But it is always fatal so to run ahead of God. The fact that it usually involves dealing ruthlessly with some one who is in our way, is a further condemnation of this impatient impulse. David lost nothing, but, on the contrary, gained everything by acting as he did. And so, too, shall we.

**Blessed be the Lord . . . that bath . . . kept his servant from evil.**

DAVID'S righteous indignation against Nabal had made an end of him, but for the intervention and intercession of his wife. Yielding to her entreaty because he recognized in it the counsel of God, he had refrained from putting into action his purpose of punishing this churlish man, at whose hands he had suffered insult. And God Himself dealt with him in such signal judgment that David could not but realize that He had interposed on his behalf. His habit of seeing the Lord in every happening saved him from regarding the fate of Nabal as a mere coincidence. According to his measure his affections were set on things above, and his spiritual vision was thus trained to discern heavenly meaning in earthly events. Hence it was that in what would to others have seemed an opportune calamity, David realized the Divine intervention to save him from an evil act.

The ministry of God's restraints is one of the great blessings of the Evangel. For He undertakes the keeping of the life which is yielded to Him in submission and loyalty. Left to ourselves, we should make countless mistakes, and fall into grievous sin by our shortsightedness and uncontrolled impulses. And it is His love which often hedges up our way so as to prevent our straying from the narrow path. Sometimes we are inclined to chafe at restrictions which forbid our liberty, and to rid ourselves of barriers which contradict our desires. If we realized, however, that it is by these very things that God works to guard us from evil, we should rejoice where now we seek to resist.

**David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.**

THUS are contrasted the destinies of David and Saul. Each goes out from this their final meeting, to follow out the predetermined purpose of his life. Saul, who has outraged all the early promise of his reign, and has long since departed in heart from the true faith of God, returns to a dishonoured palace and throne, which he is soon to lose. His pathway is a steep descent. David, on the other hand, pursues the way long since chosen—of fidelity to the God Who had set His love upon him. And although he goes out to yet further hardship and sore conflict, his pathway is an ascent. Though seemingly an exile, he is really a pilgrim. For God has shown him the pathway of life, and for him there is no fulness of joy but in His presence.

Life is to some men a mere "place," while to others it is an ever-widening pathway. The one finds his treasure on the earth, and is content with what it yields. And thus he himself becomes earthy. He fills the place for which he fits himself ; and the end, when it comes, deprives him of everything. The other is the man of ideals. Though his reach is always greater than his grasp, he is satisfied to journey onward under the sure guidance of God, knowing that His promises are not mockeries, and that every desire they have aroused within him is a prophecy of their realization. Such an one, like David, is always going on his way in the strength of the Lord God, and finds life to be an ever-growing good. This indeed is the measure of our destiny—is life a place, or a pathway ?

**David dwelt with Achish at Gath.**

EVEN the faith of David was not free from the invasion of doubt. Like other men he had his moments of depression, and in such was inclined to pass an altogether unworthy and untrue verdict on current events. At this time things were rapidly hastening toward the final conflict in which Saul's reign should be ended, and David's throne set up. He, however, entirely misjudged the providences of God, and imagined that his very life was endangered. Even so can a mood of gloom blot out for the time being the saving memory of God's goodness, and rob of its inspiration the trusted fact of His changeless purpose. Steps taken in such circumstances are apt to be mistaken, and to lead to disastrous consequences. David took refuge with Achish when he should have gone steadily forward, as hitherto, under the Divine direction ; and in so doing brought ultimate embarrassment to himself and all concerned.

The man who flees the path of duty, and endeavours to shelter himself from the sterner demands of life's obligations, is but laying up trouble. For God cares for us too much to regard as final what is merely a temporary desertion under the stress of a passing mood. And sooner or later His Spirit finds us in our hiding-place. Then we have to come back along a road of sorrow and pain, and always of humiliation, to the point of our defection. Such is the persistence of the Love that will not let us go ; and we may well rejoice that God does not leave us to ourselves. Were He to be indifferent to our mistakes we should be forever lost.

**God is departed from me.**

A MORE pitiful confession never escaped human lips. Saul has at last realized what has long been apparent to others, that the outcome of his self-willed trifling with the Word of the Lord has caused the withdrawal of His presence and favour from him. The day which began with such a bright morning of promise, closes in a night dark with angry storm-clouds. Having lost his vital hold upon God, and feeling the need of some kind of supernatural assistance, he seeks a necromancer, and by her means holds converse with the spirit of the prophet whose teaching and direction he had failed to obey. Like the wail of a lost soul is his admission that God is no longer with him. And like a rudderless ship blown toward a rocky coast by fierce winds, he desperately casts out this anchor of appeal to the dead Samuel. But only to find that the hour for such help has gone.

The warning lesson of Saul's life is obvious. It declares the unspeakable danger which attaches to all insincerity in respect of Divine things. It reveals how hollow and worthless is the world for which men lose their souls. And it leaves no doubt that such loss of soul is a stern reality. Any one of us, however richly endowed as to gift, or highly privileged as to opportunity, may yet become spiritually orphaned if we allow anything to usurp the place of God's rule in our lives. And of all perils this is the greatest. No amount of remorse, however poignant, can bring back our wasted hours or recall our squandered chances. When Christ has been driven forth from our lives He does not often return.

I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God.

THIS testimony of Achish to David's personal character is noteworthy for the light which it casts upon his conduct during his time of residence in Gath. Dwelling in a heathen city where the worship of other gods was set up, and conscious within himself also that in fleeing thither he had turned from the courageous pathway of God's Will, he nevertheless maintained his hold upon God. Possibly humbled by this self-consciousness, and realizing more than ever his need of the Divine help if he is to be freed from the entanglement into which he has got his life, he drew near to God more whole-heartedly than ever, and found Him at hand to bless. Consequently he was enabled to reflect something of His goodness before the Philistinise king, who recognized in him a servant of the God Whom he knew only by repute. Such is the power of a holy life lived out under unlikely conditions.

The eyes of the world are at all times turned upon those who profess themselves the children of God. Excellencies and flaws of character are alike unerringly detected, and either contradict or authenticate His claims. For whether we recognize it or not, we cannot escape being His witnesses ; and upon our testimony depends the opinion which others form of Him. The world always has taken, and always will take, its measure of Christ from the quality of His disciples. Is there a more urgent responsibility than that of living so consistently as to secure for Him the highest place in other men's estimation ?

**As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff.**

DAVID'S wise provision for the division of the spoils of battle secured to him the favour of all concerned, and also bound the entire people together in a common purpose. Israel's conflicts thus came to be looked upon, not as the concern of the armies alone, but of the whole people. The cause of all was the cause of each. Those who were obviously prevented from engaging the enemy, but whose work of watching made possible the service of the soldiers, were regarded as having contributed to the victory ; and the spoil was equally divided between them. The moral value of this enactment cannot be overstated in estimating the factors of the nation's consolidation.

Its abiding significance to the Church of God is of equal importance ; for it expresses an unvarying principle in connection with the great task to which Christ has commissioned His people. The making known of His Name by preaching the Gospel in all the world, calls for the united energies of all the redeemed. To some is given the great honour of actually taking the Living Word to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. They are privileged to occupy the high places of the field, to engage in hand-to-hand conflict with the enemy, and to realize the supreme joy of delivering those who have been long led captive by him at his will. But their work would never be accomplished were it not for the other wing of the army which tarries by the stuff. It is their ministry of prayer and gift which makes the pushing forward of the borders of the Kingdom possible. And, in the final reckoning, their share of the glory and reward will equal that of those who have been at the front. For God is not unrighteous.



**The battle went sore against Saul.**

FROM his interview with the spirit of Samuel, Saul went into battle with the Philistines an already-beaten man. On his own admission God had departed from him ; and, hence, defeat was inevitable. Hopeless from the beginning, as the battle proceeded, Israel's cause failed utterly. Then faced with the dishonour of unrelieved defeat Saul took his own life. Thus ended in shame the life of Israel's first king. Signally blessed of God by the gifts of His favour and the counsels of His prophet, he from the beginning had failed to rise to the greatness of his calling and privilege. To God's claims and demands he could make no better response than that of a man wedded to worldliness and self-will. Now the battle goes against him because he had himself gone against his own highest interests throughout the days of his reign. The cowardly act by which he took his own life was after all a fitting if a dramatic end to a long process of self-destruction. For, from the first day of his departure from the Lord, he had been destroying his true life.

Are the promises of complete victory in life's conflicts, which the New Covenant declares, reliable in the light of such a story ? Is the promise " that in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us " to be qualified by the questions which such a record as Saul's raises ? Or may we expect practical experience of the Divine reinforcement as we fight the good fight of faith ? Yes ! For God does not depart from any man who desires to abide in His fellowship. He only leaves that man to the consequence of his own sin and folly who deliberately departs from Him. Such an one will ever find the battle sore against him.

**Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.**

DAVID has at length reached the place for which God designed him ; but it is only over the dead body and the frustrated hopes of his friend. Jonathan lies stricken with his father upon the heights of Gilboa. In this hour of triumph David is filled with grief, recalling all that Jonathan had been to him from their first meeting. His love in its self-effacement, generosity, and courage, had surpassed the clearest reflection of the Divine love which men commonly know. And though his sun went down almost before it had risen, Jonathan lives again in David ; for he has had more to do with making him what he is than even David knows. Such a stream of pure love cannot be poured into any life without exerting in it an ennobling influence of which nothing else is capable. David's tribute to Jonathan is not one of mere emotion, but of intensest gratitude also. Had Jonathan but heard it, for how much renunciation and sacrifice would it not have atoned !

It is no mere fancy which suggests that the Lord Christ is grateful to those whose love is lavished upon Him in these days of His rejection. The Gospel states that in the coming glory He will gird Himself and come forth to serve them. And who shall say that some such words of commendation as these shall not be His reward to those who have suffered and striven for Him in earth's sore conflicts ? Such a prospect may well inspire us all to such selfless service as for which we have daily opportunity. It is by that road that love comes to its coronation.

There lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asabel.

IT is not without meaning that the casualties among Joab's force in his conflict with Abner are not recorded as being a loss of twenty men. Nineteen anonymous soldiers have lost their lives, and Asahel also. The record of the battle tells of his outstanding bravery and the manner also of his death ; and it is as though to enshrine him in the national memory that his loss is so written down. For one great value of individual action such as his is the emulation it evokes. Other young men cannot hear of personal heroism and chivalry without being themselves moved. Such an example is a positive moral asset to any community ; and yet in every likelihood he was himself entirely unconscious of doing anything beyond his mere duty. Such is the way of the true hero.

There is always a danger of our losing sight of the value of individual service in contemplating the great movements and conquests of the Church of God. Yet none of us serves therein anonymously. The heroism of any one individual may not receive commendation from fellow-servants, but is never unnoticed by our great Captain. In His own way He makes use of it also for the stimulation of others, and for the encouragement of more timorous spirits to attempt also great things for Him. We do despoite to a true conception of His interest in us, and of our own being also, if we lose sight of the value of individual effort. "I am only one, but I am one !" is the motto of every good soldier of Jesus Christ.

**Now then do it.**

THUS were the people challenged to crown David king. This had been for a long time the expressed purpose of many in the land. Now Saul was dead, and other obstacles also were removed, so that nothing stood in the way of his ascent to the throne. He had been led to that hour by the Divine hand, and the people also had been brought thither along a devious pathway by the same Lord. Now in this hour of unhindered opportunity the coronation of God's anointed must confirm the people's long-continued loyalty. For king and people alike, this exhortation was charged with immeasurable meaning.

This same word may well apply to all who have repeatedly recorded promises of loyalty and professions of devotion to the Lord Christ. Many of these, alas, become meaningless for want of translation into practical action. Indeed the things we mean to do, especially in regard to the Saviour and the service of His Kingdom, will one day constitute the heaviest condemnation of us all. For mere intention is utterly without merit ; and has, moreover, a power of recoil which visits upon the unwittingly insincere man dire punishment. Of all our common experiences unavailing remorse is perhaps the bitterest. It has beclouded many a life to the end ; for lost opportunities do not recur. The gift we mean to make, the word we mean to speak, the service we mean to render, will be either our glory or our shame, according as we carry intention into the realm of energy, or fail to do so. "Now then do it," is part of Christ's Gospel to us all.

As the Lord liveth, Who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity.

RECHAB and Baanah had entirely mistaken the character of David. They expected that the treacherous deed by which they had put the son of Saul to death would have earned them favour in his sight, as having got rid of one of his natural enemies. They recounted with joy what they had done ; but only to find his anger kindled against them, and only to meet at his hand swift retribution for their crime. For David had too great a sense of what was due from one who had himself received God's mercy, than to deal cruelly with any of his foes who found themselves in his power. God had redeemed him from sore adversities, and it behoved him, therefore, to deal with others in something of the same spirit. No man who realizes himself a dependent upon God's bounty can bear himself ruthlessly toward those who have wronged him. Least of all such an one as David, whose life has been a long continuation of God's favour and goodness.

Every spiritual privilege involves its possessor in responsibility. "*Noblesse oblige*" is no unworthy motto of the Christian life. The children of God must reflect something of the character of their Father or renounce their title of sonship. The New Testament measure is : "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." There are enemies of Christ and His cause to which His people can give no quarter. But in regard to personal enmities the true believer must be willing to suffer anything rather than contradict the Spirit of the Lord by vindictive recrimination. God's mercy is the strongest of all moral imperatives.

**David went on going and growing.**

THE inner and outer life of the king, at this stage of his career, kept pace. From conflict to conflict, and victory to victory he progressed, for God was with him. He grew to be a great conqueror because he was the while endeavouring to grow into a good man. For none can maintain fellowship with the Lord of Hosts in any other way. While David realized his need of the Divine assistance in the encounters with the enemies of Israel, he was conscious also of needing the same grace in respect of his own life. Thus his ongoing and his growth in grace were reciprocal. And in this he is a pattern to all who profess themselves the servants of God.

One of the great dangers of life is that its outward activities are apt to outstrip its inward devotions. In a world which calls for moral effort on the part of us all, we are constantly in peril of making life disproportionate. We have perforce to live so much before men that we fail to take time for living before God. The call of the street is so insistent that it drowns the note which summons us to the Sanctuary. We go on filling our life with strenuousness and our hands with toil, but we do not grow. And yet what an entire failure is that life in which the true order is not observed. If man becomes barren of soul it is little compensation, and no excuse, that he should be busy with good causes. If his life is not a true and increasingly clear witness to the character of the Lord, it is less than nothing that his energies should be devoted to religious works. The symmetrical life is the true one. We cannot go on without growing, nor can we grow without going on.

**Then David returned to bless his household.**

THE bringing back of the ark to Jerusalem was the most joyous event of David's reign. King and people united in glad thanksgiving that once again the sacred sign of God's presence was re-established in their midst. And it is full of meaning that the public celebrations being ended David returned to his own household. For every man, whether king or peasant, has a peculiar responsibility to those of his own family and home. Even the sovereign has his private life, with interests and duties to fulfil before those who know him best and most intimately. In David's case there was an obvious lack of sympathy with his ideals and with the exuberance of his rejoicing, which made it all the more difficult for him to leave the national thanksgiving, in which he took such prominent share, in order to carry out these more personal obligations, which brought him no honour, but rather contumely. Thus, however, was the true greatness of the man displayed.

It is in the sphere of home and family life that most Christians realize their greatest difficulties. Christ forewarned us that a man's foes should be "of his own household"; and yet He ever bids those who have themselves experienced His saving power to go home and bless those same households by declaring what great things He has done for them. Hence none can shirk this responsibility without being directly untrue to Him. There is nothing of the glamour of public service in this ministry. Those who have fullest opportunity of knowing us judge us for what we are, and not for what we profess. And unless, like David, we can bless our own households, our more public labours are meaningless.



**Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord.**

THE effect of Nathan's declaration, both of God's prohibition in connection with the building of the Temple, and of His promises regarding the continuation of David's line, was to send the king to the place where he was wont to hold communion with God. His eyes had been opened to see a large vision ; and uplifted by its greatness, and awed also by its far-reaching possibilities, he was impelled to seek God's face. Moreover, the disappointment over his unaccepted purpose of building a house for the Lord necessitated an interpretation which could only come from the Lord Himself. But it was as one who was no stranger to the presence of God that he went in and sat before Him. Men do not become pious in a crisis. They act then openly as they have all along been acting secretly. The habit of life, whether good or bad, is revealed involuntarily when unusual circumstances arise, as with David.

Busied with the concerns of the kingdom and his many responsibilities, David, nevertheless, realized that his true strength lay in the maintenance of his heavenward alliance. This necessity superseded all other demands upon time and energy. Nor did he hurry away from the presence of God, as, unfortunately, many of us are in the habit of doing. He stayed there, not so much speaking to God as listening to His voice. And we, too, shall be wise if we bear in mind that it takes time upon our part really to understand God's ways and clearly to apprehend His will. It is the man who sits before Him who in turn rises to walk uprightly in the way of His precepts.

**The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.**

THIS is the refrain which runs through the record of David's successful contests with Israel's foes. He smote the Philistines, the Moabites, the king of Zobah, the Syrians, and the Edomites, in a long succession of victories. And here is their explanation—"The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went"; because he only went in the way of His direction. He had not lost the sense of life as being a planned whole, and, consequently, did not miss the Divine protection. He looked upon the undertaking of these several tasks as being God's immediate Will for him. This postulated, the power of God followed in necessary sequence; and the glory of these accomplishments is thus accorded to Him alone.

No man has any right to expect God's protection and provision, if his life is not surrendered to the doing of God's purpose. Then, indeed, nothing of what He has covenanted fails; and the record of every obedient life matches David's experience. So long as we keep to the marked-out pathway the enemy has no power to harm us. We may not be immune from attack, but we are assured of victory. For God never leaves the obedient man to his own resources. To wander off voluntarily, however, into paths of self-will and sinful pleasure, and to expect that God will there work miraculously to preserve us from evil, is sheer presumption. If a man ventures near the Gates of Hell on any other mission save that of Christ's crusade, they will prevail against him. But against the God-controlled soul they are powerless.

**Mephibosheth . . . shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.**

DAVID'S kindness to the son of Jonathan was characteristic, and was worthy of the man who himself owed much to the love of his father. Lame, and practically an outcast, David reassured his anxieties and acted with kingly generosity in raising him to the dignity of an honoured guest, making him equal to his own sons at his table. From that hour new life began for the poor cripple. He dwelt secure from all fear of evil, and his every need was supplied by the royal bounty. This incident, almost more than any other of David's life, fittingly illustrates the grace of the Lord Christ in His dealings with men.

Like Mephibosheth we are the natural enemies of God, alienated from Him both by derived and wilful sin. Like him, too, we are deformed, and ill-fitted to share the honours of His House. And when we were yet enemies, and with no claim upon God save that which His own Divine nature sets up, "we were reconciled to Him by the death of His Son." He adopts us into His family, and gives us the right of sonship—to sit at His Table. There our lameness is hidden from all eyes, and we come to know Him in the intimacies of a fellowship which transforms our whole being. Such grace, however, involves us in an obligation of gratitude and loyalty which nothing but lifelong devotion can discharge. Too frequently, alas, like Mephibosheth, we forget our indebtedness, and disappoint the expectations of His goodness. What compensation can life offer to the man who has done despite to His love and forfeited His approval?

**And the Lord do that which seemeth Him good.**

THIS is the simple and direct creed of Joab, the rough soldier. Confronted by strong allied foes, his confidence, as he made dispositions for the battle, was in GOD. He could commit the issue of the day to Him, because the cause wherein the sword was drawn was His. And yet he expected no miracle to be wrought. If God's help was to be realized, he and the army must "be of good courage, and play the man, for our people and for the cities of our God." They must not shelter themselves indolently behind any fancied security arising from their worship of Jehovah. True, He will reinforce their courage, but He will not make up for their supineness. He will bless their faith, but will not accept it as a substitute for their service. Thus does the stern warrior exhort them ere the battle is joined.

In all like crises and conflicts, we too may rely upon God's assistance when we leave nothing to chance. Folded arms are not a sign of faith, but of presumptuous credulity. It is when we exert ourselves to the utmost, as the expression of our confidence, alike in the righteousness of our cause and in the faithfulness of our God, that His aid is experienced. Then "the Lord will do what seemeth Him good" becomes the language, not of complacent acceptance of fate, but of confident expectation. For it always seems good to Him to fulfil His promises and to beat down His foes before His face. He withholds no help from those whose entire life expresses co-operation with Him. But mere passivity cuts the cord of fellowship and makes for certain failure.

**The thing that David had done displeased the Lord.**

IT is almost incredible that one who had enjoyed David's experience of God's favour, and had himself proved true in so many trying circumstances and temptations, should descend to the depths of infamy to which he fell in respect of Bath-sheba and Uriah. From the sanctities of fellowship with God to the unmentionable foulness of lust and murder, seems like a descent into another world. As we read the record in all its naked warning, we are not surprised that "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." For when a man places at nought the moral law, and gives free rein to passionate self-will, God's smile is speedily withdrawn from him. His love will not suffer the wrong-doer to go on unchecked in any false security. It is of God's mercy that His displeasure is brought home with no uncertainty to the consciousness of the wrong-doer.

No man knows his own heart until he has been tempted. Many fancy themselves strong, only because they have lacked the sharp test and challenge of opportunity. It is the heat of the moral crisis which brings to the surface the dross in any character. And by the sudden glare of the fire of his own passion many an one comes to know himself. In his best moments, David would have shuddered at the mere thought of sinning after this fashion. Subsequently, when its hideousness had been thoroughly realized and repented of, and he had learned what the Lord's displeasure means, he could pray, as a chastened man : "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe." And it is only as we live in this spirit that any one of us is safe.

**By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.**

DAVID has to discover that no man liveth—or sinneth—unto himself. His transgression was noised abroad, and exposed him to the taunts of those who knew his professed devotion to the things of God. Moreover, it brought the Name of the Lord into contempt, and dragged His standard in the mire. Such, indeed, is always the consequence of open sin; but more vividly so that committed by those in positions of privilege and authority. While the sin of an ordinary individual might pass unnoticed, the same wrongdoing in the king arouses the comment of all. It is especially to this fact of the evil influence of his transgression that Nathan attaches the sentence of God's displeasure. For by this dark act David had done greater harm to the cause of God than many years of faithful service could undo.

Christ Himself has taught us to take heed lest we cast a stumbling-block in the way of others, and has given strong warning as to the fate of the one who causes His little ones to be offended. The untoward influence of unholy conduct on the part of God's children is irreparable. When His enemies are encouraged to blaspheme, and His children made to stumble, nothing can undo the mischief. Its consequence in those who are thereby adversely influenced in regard to God and His Gospel is eternal. Herein is the greatness of our own responsibility. And His discipline of His errant children is designed to invest life with a saving sense of its seriousness.

2 SAMUEL xiii. 37.

David mourned for his son every day.

ABSALOM seems to have been the spoilt child of his father, and, as is the way of spoilt children, he brought nothing but sorrow upon David. The entire record of his life is of passionate vanity, unfilial affection, and ingratitude. Yet although he had too much evidence of his unworthiness, David loved him with a strong affection which flashes out here and there in the story, as the sun bursts through dark clouds. A self-exiled fratricide, and already plotting rebellion against his father, Absalom shows himself both undeserving of David's affection and incapable of appreciating it. But who can fathom the depths of the father's heart, who possibly saw in his son some of his own transmitted weaknesses, and made excuses for him on this account? Whatever he was to others, Absalom was dear in his sight; and his continued absence was to him an unmitigated sorrow.

With all his own imperfections and blemishes, David's love for his worthless son is a reflection of the Divine Fatherhood. For although we have nothing to commend us, and are verily guilty of transgressions which defy account, God's love is unchecked and unchanged toward us. It beareth all things, and believeth all things. And it never faileth! The prodigal may wander far into the land of shame, but the Father's love goes yet further in its search for him. He may fall low indeed; but lower still, so as to be ever underneath him, are the Everlasting Arms. And God yearns for His absent sons as did David for Absalom.



Yet doth the devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him.

IN speaking thus to David, the woman of Tekoah was uttering a great truth concerning God and men. From the example and standard of the Eternal Love, she sought to stimulate David into taking action in regard to bringing his son home again. David's love went far, in that Absalom had not been displaced from his heart. She would have it go yet further ; and encouraged the king by declaring what God does in analogous circumstances. And speaking thus she phrased the Everlasting Gospel, which, hidden for ages, was fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ. For in Him God has devised means whereby the claims alike of justice and love should be satisfied, so that those who are rightly banished from His presence in consequence of sin, may be brought home again. Calvary both satisfies Divine righteousness and declares Divine love ; and no wandering man returns to the Father by any other road than that which leads round by the Cross.

In the nature of the case the first movement of redemption must be on God's part. The means must be of His devising. The impulse must be infinitely more stable than human desire and purpose. And so it is. Our security in venturing to draw near with boldness is in the fact that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." It is His hands that are outstretched to our rescue. It is of Him that Christ is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

THE loyalty of Ittai the Gittite is among the most beautiful pictures of human devotion with which the Bible furnishes us. It is not usual to find in a rough warrior, such as he was, the stirrings of a passionate love for another. Yet such was the affection which David had called forth in him, that though he was in adverse circumstances, his throne insecure, and his fortunes threatened, Ittai would take no discharge from his service. Indeed, the fact that his sword might be of assistance to him, only intensified his determination to abide with the king and to share his fortunes. David's magnanimity in urging him to abide in the city with Absalom, whose star seemed to be in the ascendant, served only to quicken his devotion. For him, in life or in death, there was no king but David.

Is there no lesson in this incident for us who profess allegiance to Christ? His greatest need in these days of His rejection and conflict is of men who count not their own lives dear unto themselves, if by sacrifice they can serve Him. And it is His own love which constrains those who experience its benefits to this self-surrender. Do we, however, always yield to the constraint? Does the assured joy of fellowship with Him inspire us to consecration of this sort, which declares that whether in life or death, where He is, we shall be also? Thus does Ittai's devotion search and judge us.

**Let him alone, and let him curse ; for the Lord hath bidden him.**

DAVID is conscious that while Shimei's curse is malicious, it is actually warranted. He knows the plague of his own heart, and realizes that he has merited the condemnation of God and man alike by his sin. Hence, while his friends and followers would have had him take steps to silence the lips of the accuser, David refuses, preferring rather to take this new trial as part of God's discipline. While Shimei was by no means to be commended for his abusive persecution of the king, he was, nevertheless, unconsciously carrying out part of the Divine intention in regard to David. And it is the grace of God which enables the king thus to look without indignation upon his vehemence.

There are times in life when we are rudely reminded of sin which has been Divinely forgiven, but which is held in human remembrance. It is indeed part of the blessing of the Gospel that, while our transgressions are behind God's back, they are often kept before our faces. For only so are we made truly humble and repentant. Sometimes the silent voices of conscience and memory unite to this end. At other times, like David, we have to bear the accusation of those who know us, and are acquainted with our ways. But in whatever form it comes, it is a wholesome thing if it leads us to magnify the mercy of God, which has long since pardoned our guilt. The accusation of man which leads us to a more complete trust in the assurance of God is truly a blessing in disguise.

The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel.

HAD Ahithophel's counsel been followed by Absalom, it would have fared ill with David and his followers. His advice as to the disposition of the usurper's available forces would inevitably have led to David's defeat. But God took His own way of bringing confusion to the rebels, and of protecting His chosen servant. Hence it was no accidental matter that the opposing counsel of Hushai should find favour with Absalom and his men ; for the hearts of all are in His hand, and He disposeth them according to His mind. Thus the worthless advice was accepted and the wise refused. So was David delivered, and the fulfilment of the Divine purpose concerning him assisted.

It is not always in frontal attack and by direct re-inforcement that the Lord disposes of His people's foes. He often employs indirect methods to bring about the answer to their prayer for deliverance. And while these test faith they also reward it. For it is never easy to believe that God is at work on our behalf when there is little evident display of His energy. Indeed, sometimes it is almost impossible to realize that prayer is being answered at all, since no movement of God's power is to be seen. In such a day it is well to remember that He is Master of a thousand plans, that His slowness is surer than our impetuosity, and that, despite all appearance to the contrary, He is most truly on the field when He is most invisible.

Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

THE utter unselfishness of David's nature was manifested in his grief at Absalom's death. He had given earnest instruction that, under no circumstances, was his life to be taken, but this had been disregarded. Now when tidings reach him that the rebellion is at an end, and that which threatened his throne has been brought to naught, his first impulse is not one of thanksgiving that his own difficulties are overcome, but of sorrow at the loss of his unworthy son. For Absalom's conduct marked him out as unworthy indeed. It may be, however, that David's keen grief had in it more than a little remorse. He had been weak in his oversight of the handsome boy, who consequently grew up to be the ill-conditioned man. And it may be, too, that David, with his quickened instinct of eternal things, realized that he whose conduct would have found no favour in the eyes of an earthly judge was quite unfit to meet the heavenly. Such a condition is the bitterness of death to any parent.

Lost opportunities for the moral influencing of lives committed to us as parents, teachers, or employers, do not recur. Upon those who know His Name rests the serious responsibility of impressing the reality of His claims upon those with whom we are thus brought into necessary connection. This can never be done by mere spasmodic religious activity, which is discounted by the prevailing quality of ordinary life. It is the happy result only of steady purpose and consistent conduct. And no amount of tearful remorse can ever atone for failure in this respect.

Wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king?

THE death of Absalom was speedily followed by reaction on the part of those who had enabled him to usurp the throne of David his father. Now that his unholy insurrection has utterly failed, the hearts of the people are turned again to their true sovereign; and throughout the land they incite one another to bring him back to Jerusalem. The men of Judah, however, who should have been the first to move in the matter of his re-establishment, hung back, possibly from shame at ever having deserted him. On this account David challenges their loyalty. He reminded them that it was little short of shame that they, his own kinsfolk, who knew him best, should be behind the rest of the nation in seeking to restore to him the honour of which he had been rebelliously deprived. Nor would he take the first steps toward that which should bring about for them also a renewal of heavenly blessing and earthly prosperity, until persuaded of their sincerity. That they responded to his challenge is a tribute alike to their true character and to his power of capturing and retaining the affections of men.

This challenge is often quoted to the Lord's people in respect of their obligation of hastening His Return. And not without meaning. For our absent King Whose Return is as certain as its date is uncertain, will not come back to assume the Throne one day before His Bride has made herself ready. Are we by practical and self-sacrificing obedience to His commands daily hastening and inviting His glorious appearing? Does the strenuous service of our lives re-echo "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"?

**The men of Judah clave unto their king.**

DAVID'S reign was by no means one of unbroken peace. The rebellion of Sheba speedily followed on that of Absalom, and tested both the king and the nation. To the trumpet-call of insurrection the whole land rallied, with the exception of the men of Judah. In the hope—which is really found deep down in every human heart—of escape from restriction, and the necessity of obedience, the majority of the people impetuously forsook David. Nor can it be imagined that this widespread defection was accomplished otherwise than by specious promises on Sheba's part. For no men take such a step as this unless with the expectation of ultimate self-advantage. Against such blandishments, however, Judah was proof. She had recovered herself under the king's challenge, after her own temporary unfaithfulness under Absalom, and now stood firm with that courage which must always characterize minorities in great moral crises. Who can measure what their fidelity meant to the king?

Those who have vowed their allegiance to David's Greater Son are never without the temptation to go back from Him. The world's seductive voice constantly sounds in their ears, and its glittering attractions dazzle their eyes—only to deceive. And nothing avails to permanently inspire the courage which cleaves unto the Lord when this temptation becomes acute but the cultivation of close fellowship with Him at all times. It is when we really know Him that we love Him enough to count the world well lost for His sake.



**And David enquired of the Lord.**

THERE is something of true heroism in the man who is not afraid to go into God's presence there to seek interpretation of that which is obviously His visitation. As year by year for three years, harvest failed and famine overspread the land, David's acquaintance with the ways of the Lord made him realize that this was no mere coincidence. Such an experience could only mean one thing—that God had an unsettled controversy with His people. And David's faith was of the order which would rather know the worst in the light of the Lord, than grope after the best in the darkness. The ultimate cause of God's disfavour might be in himself, for he knew his own heart too well to dismiss that from his reasoning. Still he was undeterred in seeking God's face, with the earnest determination to follow His direction.

It is the true instinct of the life of faith to turn to the Lord in every circumstance of perplexity. Realizing that life is of His planning, and that no area nor interest is unrelated to His concern, the true believer inquires of Him with the certainty that no mystery, whose elucidation is necessary to his peace and growth, will be left unsolved. This is the trustfulness which never gives way to despair, as though things have somehow got out of God's control, but seeks Him as His own interpreter of every untoward thing. And this is the search which never meets with disappointment. It may lead to present pain and humiliation, but only as the pathway to ultimate light and gladness.

**As for God, His way is perfect.**

DAVID'S song of thanksgiving in the day when the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies is pitched on this high note. He looks back over the experiences of the past, and recognizes even the unkindly ones as parts of God's perfect way. He has known dark days, when the sun has been hidden ; but he has never known it eclipsed. He has experienced the violence of implacable enemies ; but they have never prevailed. He has been brought into experiences of darkness and blank perplexity ; but so real has been God's hold upon him that he has been brought through them to behold the light. And his every experience of joy and sorrow alike has been as a lens through which faith has discerned something of God's character which is the ultimate security of His people. These words are then, not the expression of any conventional creed, but rather part of the Evangel which he has distilled from his varied experience of life. And he hands them on to those who are to come after him in the pilgrim-way as the secret of endurance and hope.

Is not this the faith in which we need to live to-day ? We have proved our own ways, to which we turn in life's morning, to be but vanity. And it has long been borne in upon us that the ways of the world are tortuous and cruel. But who is there who has found God's way to be other than that of perfect love and wisdom ? It may lead us through gloom as dark as the valley of the shadow, but none who follow it fail to come out on the hills of Emmanuel's Land.

**The bath made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things, and sure.**

DAVID'S greatest legacy to his people, and, indeed, to men of all time, is his interpretation of God. In these words he summarizes everything of His goodness and mercy which he had known from the beginning. Conscious of having no claim upon God which could be advanced in virtue of personal worth, he sets Him forth as the Author of his every good. Conscious, too, that had his blessings been dependent upon his own faithfulness they would long since have been withdrawn, he declares God as having bound Himself by an unchangeable Covenant, which Covenant embraces in its scope every interest and need of life. It is to God's own steadfastness that he attributes everything of His mercy and grace which has enriched him. In this faith David has lived and will die. For the Covenant includes even death—and beyond.

The sense of God's unchangeableness, and of the security of His oath, is the final assurance of His people, who have yet fuller reason for confidence than had David. For in Christ all that David foresaw and knew is amplified and fulfilled. His precious Blood is the irrefutable seal of God's purpose of good toward us. And when everything upon which the heart in its frailty is prone to lean has proved a failure, and when life itself slips from our grasp, the Cross stands fast and the Covenant sure. How confident we may then be since God has bound Himself to fail us never !

Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.

THIS was David's offering and not Araunah's ; and hence the king would not accept it at his hand. The value of any offering to the Lord is in the motive which prompts it, which motive must be sincere, if the gift is to meet with the Divine acceptance. David's sincere desire is to express his thanks to God for the cessation of the pestilence which had come upon the people as the result of his own presumption ; and it is part of his sincerity which refuses to spare himself anything in respect of this sacrificial approach to the Lord. And in so doing he has given an example for all time in the manner of true consecration and worship.

The sin of retaining the best of life's possessions for our own purposes and self-pleasing, and of devoting to the service of the Lord that for which we have no personal use, is of all insincerity the most inexcusable. For we owe to Him all that we have ; and to withhold ought, therefore, while professing to serve Him, is basest ingratitude. Moreover, all such insincerity is reactionary. The one who habitually offers on God's altar any gift which is not tinged with the red of sacrifice, unconsciously deteriorates in those finer qualities of soul which go to make up the true man. Unreality toward God infects the whole of life as with a plague ; until the man who begins by making a worthless offering ends by himself becoming worthlessly superficial. It is at once our protection and our reasonable service to give to the Lord of our best. Even that is utterly unworthy of His acceptance. Yet He graciously takes and uses it.

**And his father had not displeased him at any time.**

THIS was really the tragedy of Adonijah's life. His father had failed to restrain him in anything. His wishes had never been crossed, nor his spirit disciplined, so that in many respects he was more sinned against than sinning. David in his old age but reaped the harvest of his neglect to rule his own household in the fear of God. The rebellion of Adonijah, following upon that of Absalom, was a consequence of the things which the king had left undone. Adonijah, who had never been taught to control himself, had not the moral stamina to resist the temptation to seize the throne in his father's decline. Hence the sorrow which darkened the evening of David's life.

It is altogether mistaken affection and kindness which refuses the duty of training up a child in the way he should go. If evil tendencies are not checked at their beginnings none can tell whereunto they will grow. If a child's wishes are never crossed in regard to small things, it is almost certain that his will will never be submissive to the Divine control in the large crises of life. If the weeds are not uprooted from his heart, and the good seed sown therein in the day of the parent's opportunity, the morrow can bring forth nothing but sorrow. In what striking contrast to David's shortcoming in this respect, and of the weakness of every over-indulgent parent, is the love of our Heavenly Father. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It is by His chastisement that we learn wisdom, and grow in grace.

Keep the charge of the Lord thy God . . . that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest.

THUS does David charge Solomon ere he departs. He has himself come to know both the blessing of obedience, and the bitter fruit of defection. Life has been to him a school of experience in which he has learned that the greatest difficulties in the task of ruling a nation are found in the heart of the king himself. His position of privilege and authority exposes him to temptations from which other men are immune. Faults which are usually condemned in ordinary folk are readily condoned in the sovereign. But David has learned that the secret of a prosperous rule is in personal fidelity to the Lord. Hence it is to His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as written in the Law of Moses, that he commends Solomon, to whom the kingly responsibility is now being transferred.

This same thing is true in regard to all men, whatever be their position and circumstance. The prime responsibility of life is to "keep the charge of the Lord." This means infinitely more than mere mental assent to the ethical perfection and philosophical reasonableness of the Law. It involves submission to His authority, and self-surrender to His every apprehended precept. For Christ Himself bade men to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," with the assurance that then prosperity should attend them. As Solomon, however, failed to continuously carry out the injunction of David, how many of us likewise fail to obey Christ's own direction? And yet herein is the secret of every good. If we fail here we fail entirely.

**And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked.**

SOLOMON'S reign began with an experience of God's bountiful answer to prayer which might well have sustained him in all the subsequent years. Humbled by the consciousness of his own child-like inexperience and weakness, he readily responded to the vision, in which was set before him in generous array gifts which might be his for the asking. In response to the Divine invitation he evidenced the fact that his kingly responsibility was uppermost in his mind. The claims of God's service took precedence over every other consideration, and he requested, therefore, that wisdom which should enable him to rule faithfully the people committed to his charge. Thus honouring God he was honoured of Him. The secondary gifts which he had been willing to sacrifice for the supreme were given to him also.

God's answers to our petitions are always greater than we ask or think. While our faith has obvious limitations, His grace has none. When we seek at His hand the gifts of His promise it is only to find them immeasurably ampler than our every thought. For while He supplies our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus," He also fulfils even "the desires of them that fear Him." Perhaps the reason why the prayer-life of many is so evidently powerless, is that we are apt to confuse true values in our asking. If our hearts were set on things of eternal importance, we should not lack for the lower mercies of life also.



God gave Solomon . . . largeness of heart.

LARGE-HEARTEDNESS is the antithesis of selfishness. The self-centred man who is without concern, except for the things of his own advantage and interest, creates for himself a world, which, in its size and content, is infinitely less than that in which God intends His people to live. Even the king may become so absorbed in the affairs of his own kingdom that it may become for him the whole world. But God lifted Solomon above all littleness, and gave him the faculty of taking sympathetic share in things which did not immediately circle round himself. On this account it was that Israel entered into larger relationships with the world, and pushed back her own borders further during his reign than at any time formerly or subsequently.

A man's vision widens according to elevation. In looking on the ground a small circle confines everything that can be seen. If, however, the eye is lifted to the skies an immeasurable sweep is brought into view. And it is the same in moral and spiritual spheres. If self, even good self, is made the centre of life, life becomes small indeed. If God is made life's centre, largeness of heart follows in natural sequence. We become vitally interested in the things which concern Him, in the people who are related to Him, in the great things He is ever doing. And, on this wise, largeness of heart may be acquired of us all ; and, indeed, must be, if we are to reflect, in any degree, the nature of our Father which is in Heaven. For it is impossible to identify God with anything small or narrow or cramped.

**I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God.**

THIS purpose Solomon had received as a trust from his father, to whom the building of the Temple was forbidden service. And it accorded with his own impulse also. His reign had begun so auspiciously with promise of the Divine favour and blessing, that not only loyalty to David's wishes, but also the dictates of his own gratitude, urged him to this undertaking. Without any equivocation he declares his purpose, both to his own nation and to other peoples—a testimony alike to the depth of the longing which actuated him and the courage of his faith. This giving of the first place in interest and energy to the service of the Lord was the secret of the unprecedented prosperity and blessing which his reign brought to Israel.

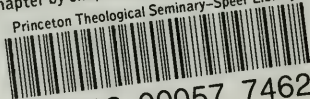
We are each inevitably building a house of some kind ; but only those who deliberately propose to devote their building to God's service build worthily. A man may build a mere office, or a shop, or a house, without any controlling moral determination. But a temple of the Lord is never so raised. If we would have our lives become the temples of the Holy Ghost, we must deliberately build with this intent. The structure of every day's doing must be laid with care ; and we must have a watchful eye, both as to the quality of the material, and the plan by which the whole is erected. For inner shrine and outer court alike are for God's dwelling, and must be worthy of Him.



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